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ABSTRACT

One in a series of stories of the Blackfeet Indians, this short novel is set in the late 1800's when the life of the Blackfeet centered around horses and buffalo, and they were one of the most powerful tribes on the northern plains. The novel consists of 12 chapters, each with a full-page illustration, and tells the story of Lame Bear, a boy who has been crippled by a broken leg. He feels that he is useless and a disgrace to his father's lodge and to his tribe until the words of an old and wise warrior change his life. He overcomes his handicap in the pursuit of a wild stallion which has eluded the greatest of warriors. He succeeds in winning the heart of the stallion and steals him away from the Flathead nation. He survives many ordeals and returns home to be honored by his father who predicts that he will become a great warrior with many horses. (JHZ)

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Quest for Courage

By Stormy Rodolph

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Quest For Courage

by

Stormy Rodolph

Illustrated by Ruth Lucero

EH-92
Indian Culture Series
Stories of the Blackfeet

Heart Butte School
Blackfeet Indian Reservation
and
Council for Indian Education
517 Rimrock Road
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STORMY RODOLPH, the author, was raised on a ranch, so she grew up with horses, and is still deeply involved with horses. While studying journalism she was a member of the University of Montana Indian Club, and is concerned with giving people as accurate as possible an interpretation of the Native American heritage.

RUTH LUCERO, Blackfeet artist, is known for her interpretating of Indian and western life.

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Chapter 1

NEW HOPE

The cougar, wild with pain, was crouching on the rocky ledge. His powerful legs were drawn under him where he could get the full benefit of their power for his leap. The black-tipped tail was whipping back and forth.

Lame Bear looked into the cold yellow eyes, trying to guess when the cougar's charge would come. He reached for his sheathed knife. His soft moccasined feet sought a firmer hold on the rock beneath him as he braced himself for the attack. The youth had been on the trail of the big cat all day. His last arrow was buried deep in the muscles of the tawny shoulder. And now he had him cornered.

The tension was broken by the cougar's scream of rage as he leaped at the youth. He hit him full in the chest, knocking him over backward. Lame Bear could feel the cat's hot breath on his face as he sought the vulnerable flesh of his throat. Searing pain tore through Lame Bear's thighs as the cougar clawed, trying to disembowel him. The youth had never known such terrible paralyzing fear as he now felt, but his instinct to survive prodded him into action. With desperate strength he plunged his knife between the cougar's ribs. Again and again he stabbed the cat until his remaining strength was gone. His arm gave out, the knife falling to the ground, useless. At the same moment the cougar's body convulsed and then went limp. The youth lay exhausted but triumphant under the dead weight of the tawny animal.

Lame Bear was dragged out of his dream by the dull aching throb of his crippled leg. It was cold. He waited impatiently as the golden rim of the sun sliced the horizon and mounted into the morning sky. It was his duty to go out before dawn to

gather the horses closer to the village so that they would be easy to catch for the day's hunt. His body trembled from the pre-dawn chill and his leg ached from the long walk to the horse herd.

Lame Bear hated his leg. The other boys laughed and called him "old woman." The shame was unbearable! A young Blackfeet Indian's entire childhood was devoted to developing himself into a strong and courageous warrior. Lame Bear's pain and shame kept him away from the games and the hunts of the other boys. He sighed. Was he destined to spend the rest of his life helping the women gather roots, berries and firewood? The thought sickened him.

His eyes turned sadly toward the horses. Today was the big buffalo hunt. Today young warriors would demonstrate their horsemanship and their hunting abilities. Some boys Lame Bear's age were going for their first hunt. They would be able to glory in the chase, and if lucky, they might bring down a buffalo calf. This would be the first step leading them from boyhood into manhood. Lame Bear's face was clouded with a pain that came from the knowledge of what his own future must be.

He had not always been crippled. Before his leg was broken, he had been very athletic. He seldom lost a foot race and in the water no one could keep up with him. Lame Bear missed dancing at the ceremonies most of all. There was nothing to equal the thrill of listening to the rhythmic beat of the drums, of moccasined feet matching the throb of the drum beat for beat. And then, as the drummers challenged the dancers with an increase in tempo. their feet flew and breathing became labored as the dancers strove to out-do each other. Suddenly the dance would end with a resounding down-beat, catching all but the dancers off guard. Lame Bear had never missed the down-beat. The youth's bitterness was great this day, for in his heart he knew that he could have been a great

warrior. Now he had no hope of such fame.

He was going into his seventh summer when the accident happened. Lame Bear and several of his friends were playing war games on their horses when Lame Bear's horse stumbled and fell, landing on the boy's leg. The force of the fall snapped Lame Bear's leg like a dry twig. The medicine man packed the leg in mud, then splinted it with sticks, but the bones mended poorly leaving him with a bad limp and considerable pain. At times he was forced to use a tree limb as a crutch. At first his friends were sympathetic and tried to include him in their play, but as they grew in years they had other things to do and Lame Bear was left behind. Now, several years later, he was lonely, in pain and humiliated.

Lame Bear's thoughts were interrupted by sounds coming from the awakening village. He could hear a dog barking, and a horse whinnied off in the distance. Smoke began to rise above the smoke flaps of the tipis as the women stoked the morning fires. As he walked down the hill to his father's lodge, he felt useless. The youth found his father preparing for the hunt. As one of the chiefs of the village, Red Eagle would be expected to lead in the hunt. Lame Bear avoided his father's eyes as he entered the tipi. Although Red Eagle was never unkind to his son, at times he showed keen disappointment. Today was one of these days. It was not easy for the chief to have a crippled son.

Barely touching his morning meal, Lame Bear watched his father prepare for the hunt. Red Eagle gathered his newest arrows and checked the stone edges for sharpness. Without sharp heads his arrows would not be able to go through the tough hides of the buffalo. He also studied his newest war lance. It took a sharp lance and a brave man to ride in on a buffalo close enough to thrust the spear into its heart. Red Eagle hoped that he would get a chance to do this on tomorrow's hunt. He wanted to bring honor to his lodge.

As he examined the arrows, Red Eagle inquired, "Did you bring in my roan horse?"

"Yes, father. He is in the band up on the hill," replied Lame Bear.

The hunters used two horses on a buffalo hunt. They rode one horse and led their best hunting horse to where the buffalo herd was grazing. A good hunting horse was given special care and was kept tethered near the warrior's tipi.

Fleet Foot was Red Eagle's best hunting horse. It took a horse with exceptional wind, speed and courage to bring a hunter in for a good kill. Fleet Foot was this kind of horse, and Red Eagle took great pride in him. He had stolen the horse from a Crow chief, making the animal even more valuable. Red Eagle smiled secretly to himself every time he recalled the incident. He could imagine the expression on the Crow's face when he stepped out of his lodge and found a severed tether rope where his horse had been standing. It would have been a sight worth seeing.

All his preparations for the hunt finished, Red Eagle walked out into the early morning sunshine. He stretched as he faced the warmth of the sun. The powerful muscles across his shoulders and back expanded, showing solid firmness under the copper skin. The brightness of the sun caused him to squint. A smile came to his ruggedly handsome face. This would be a good day. He turned and looked with admiration at his horse. Fleet Foot was a young horse, proud and full of spirit. He showed his Mustang ancestry. A powerfully-built gray, every line in his body indicated speed and endurance. The horse snorted softly as Red Eagle approached.

"Easy, young hunter," Red Eagle said to the horse. "Today is your day to make yourself famous among horses." Fleet Foot was hypnotized by Red Eagle's steady, quiet speech. He nuzzled Red Eagle's shoulder in playful curiousity.

Dogs were barking. Children were laughing and running

about and the women were chattering excitedly as the men prepared their horses for the hunt. Finally, in one movement they all mounted and waited for Red Eagle's signal. As the chief touched heels to his horse, he let out a loud yell. The roan leaped forward as if shot with an arrow. Fleet Foot followed beside, never tightening the lead rope. Dust rose high into the sky as the hunting party raced out of camp leaving behind the women, the children and Lame Bear.

The sun rose unnoticed in the sky and the singing of the birds went unheard as Lame Bear sat brooding. He did not take any interest in the activities as the women prepared to follow the hunting party. Finally, irritated by the laughter of the small children and the busy chatter of the women, he got up and limped out of camp. Bitterness grew in him even more as he walked across the open meadow. Why did the spirits do this terrible thing to him? What did he do to deserve the suffering and the humiliation? So occupied by self-pity was Lame Bear, he didn't notice the quiet approach of an old man. The youth was sitting on the bank of the creek with his back turned to the village. When the old man spoke, Lame Bear was so startled he jumped and slipped, almost falling into the water.

"Why do you sit here like an old woman waiting to die?" the old man asked.

Lame Bear sulked. He did not feel like talking but his training would not allow him to be disrespectful to an elder. He fixed his eyes on the ground. "I have no reason to live. The spirits have nothing but evil for me. I might as well be an old women."

As he spoke these words, tears were starting, but he could not let the old warrior see them. Lame Bear fought to keep what little pride he had left.

The old man's wrinkled face softened with compassion. His white hair was hanging loose on his shoulders. He stood tall and straight and there was a dignity about him that

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commanded respect. He spoke gently. "My son, why do you let this thing tear at your heart? It is like some sickness which is eating away your body. You are strong. Your mind is sharp. Yet you spend your days idle and useless. You are the son of a great chief. Why do you put shame on him?"

These words pierced Lame Bear's heart. He knew that there was truth in what the old man said, but his state of self-pity would not allow him to admit it. He managed to reply, "It's not my fault I'm crippled. I did not ask for this curse. The other boys laugh at me. The spirits have forsaken me. I might as well be dead!"

With kindness and wisdom the old warrior answered Lame Bear. "My son, you are young. What do you know of the ways of the spirits? You have not even gone out to seek your spirit-helper. You are as a summer-born foal that has no idea of the winter which is yet to come. A man does not become a great warrior by sitting in his lodge. He must go out and fight for his honor. The path which your mind is taking is too easy; it will never take you out of your lodge. You must start searching for a better way. It is time for you to go on your vision quest. Come to me when you are ready."

Without another word he turned and walked away, leaving Lame Bear to his thoughts. At first, the youth resented the old man's words. How could he possibly know what it was like to be crippled? He had been a great warrior for many years, and now in his old age he had the admiration and the respect of the whole village. The old man had never felt shame and humiliation; he could not know.

Lame Bear tried to forget his conversation with the old warrior. But try as he would, he was unable to push the words from his mind. Could the old man be right? If he could get a spirit-helper, could he overcome his crippled leg? A seed of new hope was beginning to take root in Lame Bear's mind.

His thoughts were interrupted by the angry voice of his

mother. "Are you going to stand there dreaming all day? Hurry. Go get the horses. It is time to follow your father. We have much work to do."

Chapter II

THE PRICE OF VICTORY

The hunters slowed their horses to a walk once they got out of sight of the village. It would be foolish to tire the horses early in the day. They would need to be strong and fresh when the buffalo were sighted. By mid-morning the men arrived at the place where the scout last saw the herd. The grass was short and buffalo chips were plentiful, evidence that a large herd recently grazed there. The hunters found it easy to track them in an easterly direction. The bulls were taking the cows and the calves out onto the plains where the grass would be lush and more plentiful. Here they could spend the summer putting on the fat they would need to stay alive through the long winter months.

With increasing excitement the men urged their ponies forward. Today promised them a great day of adventure and sport. Red Eagle saw the eagerness in his hunters and a smile came to his lips. It was a great time to be alive. What more could a man ask for than a fast horse, this beautiful country, a warm lodge and a son? With this last thought of his son, the smile faded from Red Eagle's face. Yes, a son is what every man wants most of all: someone to carry on the traditions of the people, someone to bring honor to his father's lodge, someone to comfort a man in his old age. Red Eagle knew that he was lucky to have a son. However, this knowledge gave him little comfort. He would never be able to share in his son's acheivements as a warrior and a hunter. Lame Bear could never do any of these things. There were times when Red Eagle had to admit to himself that he was ashamed of Lame Bear's crippled condition. The chief thought long of Lame Bear and how the boy suffered the shame and the humiliation

even more than he. This caused him sadness. With a deep sigh Red Eagle reached over to stroke the satin neck of the gray.

"Fleet Foot, you have become a son to me. It is only through you that I can gain victory," he said.

The horse's ears twitched back and forth as he listened to the gentle voice of the man. There was a strong bond of friendship between the man and the horse. As a team they worked together in perfect harmony.

By noon the hunters were getting close to their prey. The horses became excited as they caught the rank scent of the buffalo. They began dancing sideways and pulling against the restraint the riders were putting on their mouths. The men could tell that the herd was near because of the eagerness of the horses. Finally, they too could smell the strong musk odor of the buffalo as it permeated the air. Red Eagle appointed two men to go out and scout the exact position of the herd. He needed to know in which direction to run the herd because the horses and the men needed all the advantages of good terrain that they could get. The two scouts left the camp on foot, taking with them two wolf skins. They climbed a small knoll which kept them out of the buffalo's sight. Near the top the men stopped, got down on their hands and knees and covered themselves with the wolf skins. They crawled over the crest of the hill toward the buffalo herd.

The nearest animals raised their heads in mild curiosity at the approach of the disguised scouts. Wolves were a common sight and aroused no fear in the buffalo. Only the sick, the old and the very young had to fear the ripping teeth of the wolves. Down-wind, the scouts approached to within a stone's throw of the herd. They saw everything they needed to know. Silently they disappeared, leaving the herd unaware of their presence.

When the two scouts got back, they excitedly reported that there were many females in the herd. At this news the hunters

mounted their hunting horses and were ready to go. Red Eagle briefly mapped out their approach to the buffalo. The riders would fan out and move in from the north, forcing the herd to run in a southerly direction. Once the buffalo were in full stampede, the riders could then flank them, seeking out the choicest kills.

The hunters topped the crest of the hill and kicked their ponies into a run as they approached the herd. Each man was yelling at the top of his lungs. The buffalo stood, momentarily stunned by the terrible sight and sound of the hunters charging down on them. Several animals snorted and spun, running into their neighbors. Like an avalanche gathering snow and momentum, the huge herd started into motion. It seemed forever before the men got them into full stampede, but it actually was only seconds from the moment they came over the hill.

Each hunter singled out an animal which would be his first kill and guided his horse in that direction. The more experienced hunters moved in on their prey, brushing their knees against the shaggy sides of the buffalo as the horse and beast strived to out run each other. As the hunter came along side of the buffalo's shoulder he would draw his bow, lean as close to the animal as possible and release his arrow. In order to kill the animal, the arrow and the shaft had to penetrate the thick hide, pierce the rib cage and enter the heart or the lungs of the beast. This took great skill on the part of the hunter. Several buffalo were wounded many times before they finally were brought down.

Red Eagle had killed several choice fat cows. Fleet Foot was still running strong beneath him when he spotted one of the "yellow ones" off to his left. This female had never lost her yellow baby color, making her hide very valuable. Red Eagle saw his chance for a great victory in this animal. Here was a cow to kill with his lance. Fleet Foot, sensing Red Eagle's

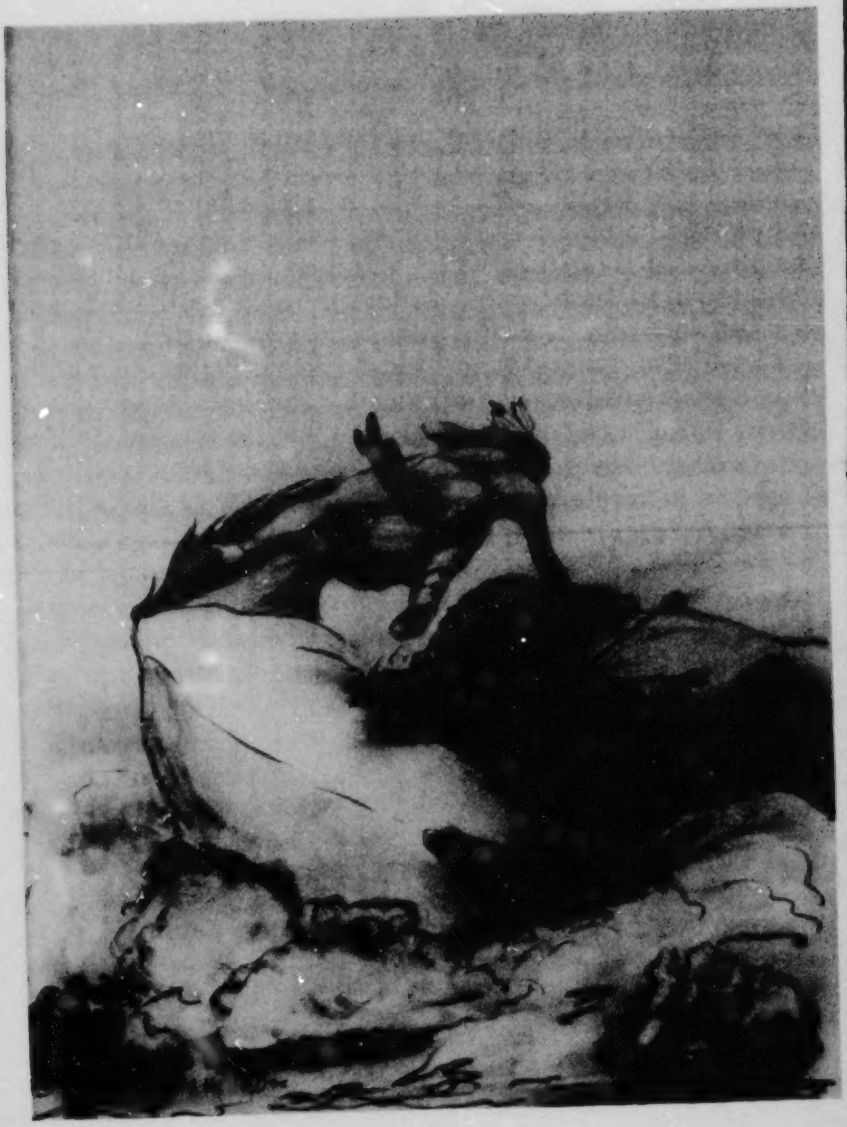
excitement, moved eagerly in on the buffalo. The cow strived mightily to out run the horse, her mouth frothing foam, her nostrils dialating to a blood red and her eyes rimmed white in terror. Fleet Foot was fast and could endure. He moved Red Eagle into a good killing position. Grabbing his lance in both hands, Red Eagle leaned over to make the hard killing thrust. One slip at this crucial moment would mean sudden death to the rider, as he would lose his balance and be trampled by the stampeding animals.

Red Eagle put all of his strength behind his thrust. The point of the spear rested momentarily against the tough hide. Still pushing on the shaft, Red Eagle felt it begin to give and his excitement grew. He pushed harder, for the spear had yet to go between the buffalo's ribs. The cow bellowed in pain, maddened by the smell of her own blood. The strain of the race was beginning to tell on both the man and the horse. Red Eagle knew if he did not make his kill now, he would fail. With all of his remaining strength he pushed on the shaft of the spear. With an unexpected suddenness, it gave. The cow gasped as a stream of blood gushed from her mouth and nostrils. Running a few more yards, as if unwilling to give in, she finally went to her knees. The momentum of her body slid her along the ground. Finally she came to a stop, muscles and legs jerking spasmodically until a great shudder ran through her, and she lay still.

With the last reflex of the buffalo's body, Red Eagle gave a great sigh of relief. He pulled his violently blowing horse to a stop. Sweat was dripping from Fleet Foot's heaving flanks and his legs were trembling. Red Eagle turned to admire his kill, unmindful of the dust and the confusion of animals around him. He did not see the wounded buffalo off to the right of Fleet Foot. Several arrows were embedded in her crest and shoulders. The cow was crazy with pain. In the blur of motion around her, the sudden stillness of the horse and the rider

caught her attention. She let out a bellow and charged. Fleet Foot saw her coming, but in his state of exhaustion, turned too slowly. Red Eagle was caught completely off guard. The mammoth head of the cow hit Fleet Foot in the side, throwing the horse off his feet. The impact threw Red Eagle from his mount. Fleet Foot screamed as the sharp horns tore at the tender flesh of his belly and flanks. Red Eagle lay stunned and helpless. His arrows were lost and his only lance was embedded in the body of the dead cow. He tried to shut out the horrible sounds of the buffalo and the horse.

One of the hunters, seeing Red Eagle's plight, charged his horse through the swirling mass of animals. A well-aimed arrow brought the cow to her knees, her head buried in Fleet Foot's belly. The gray lay shivering and groaning. The hunter took his knife and mercifully cut the throat of the suffering horse. As Fleet Foot's spirit departed, the hunter cut off a lock of the horse's mane and put it in his medicine pouch. In this way he would always have with him the courage of the great horse. Red Eagle slowly walked over to his dead horse and did the same. This was the price of victory. It left only emptiness in Red Eagle's heart.



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Chapter III
THE DECISION

Lame Bear's mother was surprised by his instant obedience to her command. Usually she had to speak to him several times before he would do what she asked. Because he was their only son, she and Red Eagle had pampered and spoiled him. After his injury he had become even more willful. Now he was limping without complaint after the other boys who were on their way to gather in the horses needed for the day's work. As she watched him go she wondered what he had been thinking about when she scolded him. He seemed different now.

Today Lame Bear was eager to obey his mother. He was filled with a new sense of anticipation. Something was going to happen. It was like he was waking up after being asleep for a long time.

After looking over the horse herd, Lame Bear located his pinto mare and the old buckskin that his mother used for a travois horse. A soft whistle brought the pinto mare to him, but the buckskin was less willing to be caught. He played cat and mouse with Lame Bear, weaving in and out among the other horses, just out of Lame Bear's reach. Lame Bear laughingly scolded the buckskin.

"You old fox, you know that today you must work. Why do you play games? A horse your age should know better," he said.

The old horse gave Lame Bear a playful nip on the arm. Together, the youth and the two horses returned to the lodge of Red Eagle. Lame Bear's mother scolded him for taking so long with the horses, but Lame Bear knew she was too excited to be serious. It was not long before the travois was in place behind the buckskin. When Lame Bear was mounted, he

and his mother headed out of camp in the direction that the hunters had taken. Soon the other women and children were strung out behind them. Lame Bear urged his mare into a trot. He wanted to be the first one to sight the buffalo kills. By mid-afternoon the sun was getting hot. There was no shade traveling on the plains. It was important for them to find the meat quickly. If the carcasses lay too long in the sun they would spoil.

The pinto mare reached the top of the knoll they were climbing. Lame Bear reined her in, thrilled by the sight before him. As far as he could see the plains were dotted with the brown bodies of buffalo. His first impulse was to yell for joy and run his mare off the hill, but he was afraid the hunters would think him foolish if they saw him. His job was to find the first buffalo that his father killed. He would recognize it by the identifying marks on the shaft of the arrows or the spear that killed it. Each warrior had his own mark for his weapons. This settled the ownership of the kill. If two different arrows were found in the body, the carcass was shared by both families. After several minutes of riding among the carcasses, Lame Bear finally found Red Eagle's arrow. He dismounted, quickly going to work on the dead buffalo. He skinned the carcass, his sharp knife slashing the membrane that held the hide to the body. Then he gutted the animal, being careful not to puncture any organs. Every part of the body was used, nothing was wasted. The carcass was now ready to be cut up. The meat would be wrapped in the hide so that it could more easily be hauled on the travois.

Lame Bear enjoyed his work, but he was impatient to see the hunters. It sent chills down his spine to listen to their stories about the hunt. Oh, if only someday he could be telling those stories! It was a thrill to see the hunters come riding in, singing victory songs and showing off their riding skills. It was always an exciting time with feasting, dancing and story-telling. The

only time that it was not fun was when the boys his age would get up to tell their stories of victory. When they did, Lame Bear would leave the gathering to go off and brood about his failings.

Lame Bear got up from skinning the buffalo. He moved to where he left his mare. Her alert pose stopped him short. She was staring intently at something out on the prairie. Lame Bear, fearing that it might be an enemy, whistled the mare over to him. He quickly hid her in a hollow behind a low hill. He then crawled on his belly to the top of the hill to look over. His vision blurred a few seconds by the shimmering heat waves. What he first saw looked like a great brown cloud floating out on the prairie. As his eyes began to focus, he could make out the shapes of horses and riders. At first he though that it was an enemy raiding party, but after observing them for several minutes he felt sure it wasn't. The group of horsemen were behaving strangely. They were in a circle around something, but Lame Bear could not tell what it was. This called for a closer investigation. The women and the other children were busy butchering the dead buffalo. They would never miss him. Lame Bear mounted his mare and rode out of the hollow towards the strange gathering on the plains.

News of Red Eagle's plight had spread rapidly through the hunting party. Every man headed his horse towards the scene of the struggle. Two Feathers had been the first hunter to arrive. He was the one who killed the enraged cow and mercifully ended Fleet Foot's suffering. The other hunters, seeing that nothing could be done, gathered in respectful silence around the dead horse. Generally not much attention was paid to the death of a horse. Death often came swiftly and violently to men and animals and was considered part of the natural order of life. But Fleet Foot's case was different. Not only was he their chief's horse, but he had been a horse coveted by each one of them. Many attempts had been made

to steal the gray stallion from the camp of the Crows. With patience, wisdom and skill Red Eagle had stolen the horse and won his spirit. No man in the Blackfeet nation had ever ridden him except Red Eagle. They had won many honors and victories and today had been no exception. Because he was such an outstanding horse, many of the braves felt that Fleet Foot had special spirit powers. Several of them cut off pieces of his mane to put in their medicine pouches. They would then carry these powers with them wherever they went.

Red Eagle was badly shaken when he was thrown from his horse. It was like a horrible dream and he could not wake up. Because of shock, he was having a hard time comprehending the death of Fleet Foot. He fingered the coarse black mane hair that he held in his hand. Never again would it be lifted off of the sleek gray neck by the wind. Red Eagle closed his eyes, seeing in his mind the grace and the speed of the gray stallion. It was no good! He must try to forget. His thoughts were slowly penetrated by the sound of an approaching horse. Looking up, he recognized Lame Bear's pinto mare. What was the boy doing here? Was it really so late in the day? Seeing the excitement on the boy's face Red Eagle quickly looked away. Lame Bear had not yet seen Fleet Foot.

Lame Bear approached the distant horseman with caution. As he neared the group, he began to recognize the hunting party. His imagination ran away with him. Some great event must have taken place for the riders to be gathered that way. Lame Bear kicked his mare into a lope. He was in a hurry to get in on the excitement. The first thing that he noticed was the "yellow one" with the shaft of his father's spear sticking out of it. The color of the cow's shaggy hair made his heart race. What a victory for Red Eagle and Fleet Foot! His eyes searched for his father and the gray stallion. There was his father, but what was he doing on the ground? Where was Fleet Foot?

Lame Bear felt weak and sick. At first he refused to believe

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what he saw. That bloody mess of horse flesh wasn't Fleet Foot. It couldn't be! Quickly he searched his father's face for the answer. Red Eagle's expression spoke louder than words. Hot tears welled in Lame Bear's eyes. He turned his mare away, and then he cried. He cried for Fleet Foot, but most of all, he cried for his father. And he cried because he was crippled and could be of no comfort to his father.

The little pinto mare walked on into the evening, her rider unaware of where she was going. Only when she came to a stream and stopped to drink did Lame Bear react. He slid from her back and buried his face in the sparkling cold water. The icy fingers of the water worked on his brain and broke it loose from its stupor. When Lame Bear climbed back on his mare he was changed. With definite purpose he turned her back towards their village. In the morning he would go to see the old man, Fine Bull.

Chapter IV
THE QUEST

Dawn was turning the eastern sky to a pale rose color when Lame Bear entered the village. He had spent most of the night riding, thinking of the old man's words of reproof. Being out all night in the cold mountain air had left his body stiff and sore. He guided his mare directly to Fine Bull's lodge. It was located near the outside perimeter of the camp so no one saw him. He pulled up outside the lodge entrance and slid slowly from the mare's back. As his feet struck the ground, a sharp pain shot through his bad leg causing him to groan. He limped to the mare's head and slipped the guide rope out of her mouth. She waited momentarily while he stroked her neck, then she trotted out to join the other horses.

Lame Bear turned to the lodge entrance and hesitated. His mind was filled with doubts. He was afraid that Fine Bull might not be there or that he might have changed his mind about helping him. He was also afraid that his gift of a small rabbit would be unacceptable. All of these thoughts almost caused Lame Bear to turn away, but then the memory of Fleet Foot's mutilated body lying out on the plains pushed the doubtful thoughts out of his mind. Lame Bear pushed the entrance flap aside and quickly entered the lodge. He stood still a moment letting his eyes get accustomed to the dark.

"My son, what took you so long?" It was the voice of Fine Bull.

"How did you know that it was me?" Lame Bear asked.

"I heard the approaching steps of your horse and when you dismounted, your pain. But what puzzles me is why you waited so long to enter my lodge." The old man was leaning back comfortably against his sleeping mat carefully studying Lame Bear's face.

Lame Bear stood silent, not knowing what to say. He did not want to tell Fine Bull what had happened to his father. He was afraid that the old man would feel sorry for him, and pity was the last thing that he needed or wanted. At last he answered. "I have come to seek your help. You spoke of my need to find a spirit-helper. I have come. I am ready!"

Fine Bull was curious as to why Lame Bear had come to him so suddenly but he did not ask. He could see that something had happened, but the painful look on Lame Bear's face told him not to inquire.

Lame Bear interrupted the old man's thoughts. "When can we start?"

"When do you wish to start?" asked Fine Bull.

"Now!" said Lame Bear.

"As you wish." Fine Bull rose slowly to his feet. "Come with me."

The old man quickly gathered the things that he would need and placed them in a bundle. Motioning Lame Bear to follow, he slipped quietly past the entrance flap. The village was quiet. The hunters and their families were exhausted from their long day and late return the evening before. The feasting and story telling had lasted most of the night and now everyone was sleeping soundly.

Fine Bull stopped at another tipi not far from his own. He motioned Lame Bear to stay outside while he went in. The youth could hear the low sound of two men talking. Fine Bull soon emerged from the tipi, followed by another old man. This man was to help Fine Bull and Lame Bear with the purification ritual.

The two men and the youth headed in the direction of the mountains, their snow-capped summits showing pink in the dawn. As Lame Bear faced those mountains, his heart grew faint. Never before had his crippled leg felt so weak. He wanted desperately to turn and run to the warmth and the

security of his father's lodge. He was sure that he would die up there in those mountains. He had heard stories of young boys who had gone on their vision quests and how they never had returned, and they had been strong and healthy with two good legs. As these thoughts raced through Lame Bear's mind, the steady pace of Fine Bull took them deeper and deeper into the high country.

As Lame Bear watched his surrounding, he realized that he never had been up this high into the mountains. Their beauty awed him. The faces of the mountains looked like they had been cut off by a sharp knife. The youth looked in reverence on the deep glacial lakes which were a bright turquoise. Because these lakes were fed by the melting glaciers, they were full of tiny bits of rock and dirt which made them opaque, giving them the appearance of huge pieces of turquoise nestled in a setting of majestic mountains. Lame Bear had heard the others tell stories of these mountains, but they had not done justice to the view that was now before him.

Fine Bull stopped, letting the boy drink in the sights around him. They were standing in a small, grassy clearing. A grove of aspens on the other side indicated the presence of a clear mountain spring. The pungent smell of pines was heavy in the hot air. Lame Bear closed his eyes and breathed in deeply, letting the warmth of the sun ease his aching muscles.

He was brought out of his trance by Fine Bull's voice. "It is time for you to build the sweat lodge. We will prepare the fire."

Lame Bear quickly went to gather the saplings that he would need to build his sweat lodge. He placed one end of each stick in the ground, bending them into a graceful arc and then secured the other end of the stick in the ground. This frame work was then covered completely with hide. A small entrance facing to the east was left open until the purification was to take place. As soon as Lame Bear was finished he sat

down and studied the mountains until he saw one peak which towered above the others. It s summit reached beyond the limits of his mind. He waited until Fine Bull stopped to rest and then he asked, "Fine Bull, what mountain is that one?"

Fine Bull turned to look where Lame Bear was pointing. His old eyes squinted against the glare of the sun. "That is Thunder Mountain, my son."

He left it at that and turned back to his work. Lame Bear had heard many legends about Thunder Mountain. It was held sacred by both the Bloods and the Piegans. The Indians believed the mountain to have great spirit powers. Sometimes it spoke in a great thundering voice, and nobody went near it at this time. The mountain did most of its thundering in the Spring. With the thaw, huge chunks of ice would break off of the glaciers and fall into the lake below. The mountains would echo with the concussion. Thunder Mountain and its waters were sacred and not to be trifled with in any way.

A new thought struck Lame Bear as he reflected on the legends of Thunder Mountain. This was where Fine Bull was going to send him on his cry for power! Panic seized him. The thought of facing the mountain alone and unarmed unnerved him. Quickly he looked around to see if he could sneak away. It was too late. Fine Bull was calling him. "Come, it is time to enter the sweat lodge."

Fine Bull went into the sweat lodge first. Inside he purified himself with sweet grass then lit the sacred pipe and offered it in prayer to all of the Earth Powers.

"My son, you may now come in." the old man said.

Lame Bear, wearing only his breech cloth, entered the sweat lodge. Without speaking he sat down cross-legged beside Fine Bull. The old man said more prayers, asking the spirits to be merciful to Lame Bear as he cried for power. He then gave the pipe to Lame Bear. He took it and offered it to the powers. The helper outside then brought in the hot rocks. Fine Bull said

more prayers, asking for Lame Bear's protection and success. Then the helper came in with more hot rocks and water. The rocks sizzled and spit as the cold water hit them. Steam began to fill the lodge. The helper left and closed the entrance. Lame Bear and Fine bull were engulfed in a darkness so thick that they could feel it pressing down on them.

Time stood still for Lame Bear. He could feel the sweat running down his body, cleansing him of all impurities. The outside helper came into the lodge three more times with hot rocks and more water. Each time that the entrance flap was raised, the bright light stabbed Lame Bear's eyes, causing him to close them tightly against the painful glare.

The weight of the darkness and the steam pressed in on Lame Bear. He felt weak and breathless. He wanted to shout, to yell, anything to break the oppressive silence, but no sound would come from his throat. Just when he thought that he could stand no more, Fine Bull spoke, "It is time to go, my son."

The outside flap was thrown open. Lame Bear threw up his arm to shield his eyes. Weakly he crawled through the entrance on his hands and knees and out into the sunshine. His skin was hot and sweaty. The gentle breeze outside of the sweat lodge caressed his body, making him feel totally relaxed.

Fine Bull's voice brought him out of his dream-like state. "It is time for us to go. The sun is low in the sky and we have far to travel. You must go to Thunder Mountain and climb as high as you can. When you can go no further, find a level place where you can make your cry for power. You may take no food, water or weapons. May the spirits hear your cry."

Lame Bear said nothing. He stood before the old man, wearing only his breech cloth. The youth shivered as the breeze began to cool his body. Fine Bull took a buffalo robe and draped it over Lame Bear's head and around his body, leaving him a small opening to see out of. The old man then handed Lame Bear a large object that he was to carry before

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him as an offering to the Earth Powers. Fine Bull wrapped himself in his own robe, turned and headed in the direction of the mountain. Lame Bear followed.

The shadows were beginning to grow long, so they wanted to get as near to the base of the mountain as they could before darkness overtook them. For the first time Lame Bear became painfully aware of how tired he was. His leg had gone to sleep in the sweat lodge and now it was prickling and throbbing. With each step he felt it would collapse under him. As he walked on into the growing darkness, exhaustion swept over him.

A thin new moon made its way slowly up from the horizon, its faint light shimmering through the boughs of the pine trees. In the distance, a lone coyote howled. Soon he was joined by other coyotes and the night air was filled with their spine-tingling chorus. A great owl swooped noiselessly out of the tree tops in search of prey.

The darkness sharpened Lame Bear's awareness to a keen edge. He did not miss a sound or a movement in the night. When he and Fine Bull came to a small spring, the old man dropped down on his stomach and drank deeply. Lame Bear followed his example. He had been allowed to drink before he entered the sweat lodge. After that food was forbidden him until his return from Thunder Mountain and he could not drink until after sunset. The youth was determined to ignore his growling stomach. After finding a soft place under some pine trees, Lame Bear lay down and pulled the buffalo robe tightly around himself. Exhaustion overcame him and he slipped into a deep slumber.

Fine Bull woke up as soon as the eastern sky began to grow light. He walked over to where Lame Bear was sleeping and gently touched his shoulder. "Come, wake up. It is time for you to go."

Lame Bear looked bewildered. He rubbed his sleep-filled

eyes and squinted at Fine Bull. "What is wrong? What is it?"

As soon as he spoke he became keenly aware of his sore body and the sharp pangs of hunger that were gnawing at his stomach. Now he remembered! He hated to crawl out from under his buffalo robe, but he knew that he would need an early start. Today's journey would be long and difficult.

Fine Bull spoke. "I can go no further with you. I must leave. May the spirits hear your cry for power."

Lame Bear opened his mouth to speak. "But I . . ."

Fine Bull had already turned away and was walking back down the trail. Lame Bear hesitated for a moment, then went to the spring. There he splashed the icy water on his face and body, bringing all of his senses acutely alive. With his eyes on Thunder Mountain, he started off on his journey. The trail was still fairly easy and Lame Bear rejoiced in the beauty of the day. The first rays of the morning sun were just beginning to hit his back, taking away some of the early morning chill. The forest was alive with the singing of birds. Dew sparkled and twinkled on the blades of grass and on the tips of the pine needles. Lame Bear became filled with a profound appreciation of life. All of his pain and sorrows were lost in these few precious moments of communion with Nature. For a moment he forgot about his crippled leg as he walked through this enchanted alpine forest.

As the sun rose higher in the sky, the youth found that the trail became increasingly more difficult. It was not long before the forest lost its enchantment as Lame Bear concentrated all of his attention on where he was walking. The trail was rising sharply and downed timber hindered his progress by causing him to leave the trail to get around it.

Lame Bear found himself stopping often, his chest heaving from shortness of breath. He was beginning to feel the effects of no food. In his stomach was a dull ache and his mouth felt full of sand. He sat down on a log and looked at his crippled leg. It was noticeably smaller than his good leg. The muscles in

it were twitching spasmodically. It reminded him of a rabbit that he once had killed. Even after it was dead, it's muscles had twitched and jumped just like the ones in his leg were doing now. The longer Lame Bear looked at his leg the more it seemed not to be a part of him. He felt as if he could just pick it up and throw it away. With a sigh he got up from the log and headed on up the trail.

By mid-afternoon the heat was becoming unbearable. Lame Bear picked up a pebble and put it into his mouth. His saliva started working and temporarily relieved the dryness. He felt dizzy and faint. He sat down in the shade of a small tree. Lame Bear wondered if he would ever reach Thunder Mountain and if it was really worth it. His body felt as if it were staked to the earth. He had no will to rise. Discouraged and exhausted he lay against the tree, his thoughts turning to venison steaks and cold mountain streams.

Suddenly the silence was shattered by a raucous scolding. Looking up, Lame Bear saw a fat gray bird sitting on a branch not far above his head. The bird was large, his gray feathers accented by black and white markings. His bright, black eyes were shining inquisitively. This bird, noted for his boldness and habit of carrying things away from camp sites, would be named the "Camp Robber" by mountain men to come.

Lame Bear was surprised by the bird's arrival. His thoughts had been far away. "Hello little gray brother. What are you doing here so high up in the mountains?"

The Camp Robber squawked and chattered, ruffling his feathers.

"Ah, I see. You wonder the same about me. I'm not sure little brother, I'm not sure," said Lame Bear.

The bird jumped from limb to limb, stopping now and then to preen his feathers. Lame Bear was enjoying the bird's company and had forgotten his discomfort for the moment. Then, with a loud squawk, the bird left the tree and flew up the

trail. Lame Bear could hear him chattering in the trees up ahead. It seemed as if he were calling to the youth, encouraging him to follow. Lame Bear smiled and got to his feet. "All right little brother, you win. I'm coming," he said.

For two hours the Camp Robber kept to the trail. Sometimes he would stay near Lame Bear, then he would fly far ahead. But he always returned to cheer the youth on his way. Lame Bear knew that without the bird's company he would never have been able to keep going.

Lame Bear came to the top of a steep rise. Here the trail took a sudden dip downward. As the trail progressed down hill the trees began to thin out. The frantic chattering of the Camp Robber drew his attention from the trail. He walked over to where the bird was perched in a juniper tree. He was so busy watching the bird that he did not immediately see the view before him. When he finally lowered his gaze he drew in his breath sharply. Never in his life had he ever seen anything like what lay before him now. Rising majestically before him was Thunder Mountain. Every inch of its surface was marked by sharp crags and crevices with steep drop offs. Halfway down the face of the mountain was a huge glacial field, one of the last remnants of the Ice Age. Small streams trickled out from under the ice to run into the oval lake at its base. The lake was the color of gem turquoise, its surface shimmering in the afternoon sun. Lame Bear stood still in awe. The Camp Robber ceased its idle chattering. The youth's heart began to swell and his eyes filled with tears. The power of the mountain filled him until everything else was pushed out.

Finally Lame Bear began to work his way around the lake. After much scouting and detouring he finally came to the headwaters. The mountain rose up before him into eternity. After studying the mountain, Lame Bear realized that he could never get above the glacial field so he set out to get as close to the ice pack as possible. The climbing was steep and he did

much of it on his hands and knees. He did not notice the bleeding cuts. All of his movements were mechanical now. His mind was obsessed with only one thought: to keep climbing until he could go no further.

The last rays of the sun were swiftly disappearing when Lame Bear finally pulled himself up on the ledge. It was six feet long and three feet deep. It was not much but it was as far as he could go. With the coming of night a cold wind blew down off of the glacier, chilling him to the bone.

Lame Bear quickly made an altar. He placed his offerings and his pipe on the ledge and said prayers to all of the great powers, asking them to grant him success as he cried for power. Lame Bear remained standing with his back against the cliff, while darkness settled down around him like a blanket.

Chapter V

THE VISION

For three days and three nights Lame Bear stayed on the ledge. He lost all sense of time. He spent his days praying to the Earth Powers, asking them to send him a spirit helper. At night he slept by his altar with his feet pointing to the east.

The youth was no longer aware that his body was numb from cold, hunger, and dehydration because now his mind was in a much greater state of anguish than his body. The vision had not come. The spirits were turning their backs on him because he was crippled. Lame Bear ground his teeth and cursed his leg. His mind was made up. He would stay on the ledge until he died if that was what they wanted.

In the late afternoon of the fourth day, storm clouds began to gather. Big, dark thunderheads loomed up over Thunder Mountain. The soft whispering pines began to roar like the ocean surf as the storm winds whipped through them. Darkness came early to the ledge and with it came a driving rain. Lightning flashed and the thunder echoed and re-echoed off of the rock walls. Lame Bear sat down against the wall, neither his body nor his mind registering the rain that was pelting him. Both the night and the rain seemed endless. Finally the dim light of dawn penetrated Lame Bear's consciousness. The mountains were clothed in a heavy fog. The mist was so thick that Lame Bear could taste it on his lips. It gave a cool, tingling sensation to his swollen, burning tongue. The youth leaned his head back against the hard rock and sighed. He longed for release from his ordeal.

A distant rhythmic tatoo caught Lame Bear's attention. He shook his head, trying to clear the sound out of his ears, but it was still there, growing louder. It was such a familiar sound. All of Lame Bear's senses concentrated on the rhythmic beat, and

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then his face registered recognition. It was the galloping sound of a horse. His father must have come looking for him. Fine Bull had betrayed his confidence! No matter. He would not go back, not even with his father. Whoever it was, they were riding recklessly. The trail was much too treacherous for anything but a walk, even on a clear day.

While Lame Bear was trying to figure out who was coming up the trail, he became surrounded by a brilliant white light. He threw up his arm to shield his eyes and he trembled in bewilderment. From somewhere within the light, a deep, rich voice spoke to him. "Lame Bear, do not be afraid. I have come with your spirit helper. You may look at me now."

Lame Bear slowly dropped his arm. Standing before him, in the air, was the most magnificent warrior he had ever seen. The man was dressed in a full ceremonial costume of pure white buckskin. The designs made by the delicately colored quill stood out against the white background like the first flowers of spring stand out on a snow-covered hillside. His black hair hung on his shoulders, shining in the light like the wing feathers of the raven.

The youth tried to speak but he could not. He took up his pipe and touched it to his lips. He then offered it to the spirit before him. After sharing Lame Bear's pipe, the warrior and the light disappeared as suddenly as they had appeared. Again there was the sound of hoofbeats. Suddenly the air was cut by a shrill neigh. It was so familiar, yet something about it sent a chill down Lame Bear's spine. He knew that horse! Then he saw it out in front of him in the fog. It was gray, almost invisible in the thickness of the mist. The horse approached, the black mane whipping back off of the silver gray neck in the wind. Fleet Foot! Lame Bear gasped. He closed his eyes and then opened them quickly. The horse was still there. Lame Bear's heart pounded in his chest, and his breath came in short gasps.

The spirit horse approached the youth. The expression on

the animal's face was almost human. He spoke quietly. "Do not be afraid. It is I, Fleet Foot. The Earth Powers have sent me to be your spirit helper. I have a message for you. Listen carefully because I can only tell you this once. My death was no accident. It was necessary so that I could help you. It was a horse that brought you the shame of your crippled leg. It will be a horse that will raise you to the heights of glory. On the back of a fine horse your leg will mean nothing. You will need a powerful horse, one that is swift and full of courage. I cannot tell you what this horse looks like. You must search for him and when you find him you will know him as your own. The Earth Powers are giving you the gift of the horseman. With this gift and my help you will be able to handle any horse. I must go now. If you need my help, call out to me and I will be with you."

With a toss of his head Fleet Foot wheeled and galloped off into the mist. For a long time Lame Bear could not move. He sat trying to take in the full meaning of what had just happened. He was having doubts about the reality of his vision when he saw a strange object on the ledge. Lame Bear reached out and picked it up. It was a lock of horse hair, black, white and silver. Many times the youth had run his fingers through this same mane hair. It belonged to the gray stallion, Fleet Foot.

The youth took the medicine pouch from around his neck and carefully placed the horse hair in it. Replacing the pouch, he picked up his buffalo robe and eased himself off of the ledge. Almost blindly he stumbled down the trail. He walked and walked until he walked himself into the ground. The touch of cold water on his skin revived him. His hand was dangling in a bubbling mountain spring. Lame Bear dragged himself forward until his face could reach the water. With his hand he touched the cold water to his dry, cracked lips and then over the rest of his face. Cupping his hands, he brought

the water to his mouth. He drank in small sips, but the shock of the water cramped his stomach and he doubled over in pain.

Most of the morning Lame Bear stayed by the spring, resting and drinking small amounts of water until it no longer cramped his stomach. The sun finally burned its way through the fog and warmed his aching body. Then he lay back in the cool grass and fell asleep. Lame Bear slept until dawn of the next day. When he woke up the sun was just making its way over the tops of the mountains. At first he was not sure what it was that woke him. A sharp pain in his stomach reminded him. He must get food today or he would never make it back to camp. After refreshing himself at the spring, he headed for the forest in search of food. His hunger was soon relieved by the edible roots that he found there.

With his physical needs met, Lame Bear started to reflect on what had happened to him. It all seemed so unreal. He had to take the horse hair from his medicine pouch to convince himself that he had a vision. Holding the hair in his hand, Lame Bear squeezed it tightly and a big smile spread across his face. All of a sudden he let out a yell and ran down the trail. He could hardly wait until he found Fine Bull. He would tell him that the vision had come and he would ask the old man's advice about what he should do next. Lame Bear was so excited that he did not realize that he was running on his bad leg. The past days of strenuous exercise had strengthened him. Since his accident he had babied himself, never pushing himself for fear of failure. It had been easier to make excuses because of his leg than to try to rise above his handicap. Now events had forced him to look outside of himself. Self-pity was having its final death struggle within his heart.

By mid-afternoon Lame Bear entered the open meadow where he had been purified. It seemed to the youth like years had passed since that day. His excitement rose because he knew that by nightfall he would be in the lodge of Fine Bull. He would not return to his father's lodge until he could bring honor and victory with him. As he hurried down the trail, the

words of Fleet Foot echoed in his mind. How was he going to get the horse that he needed? He had never captured and tamed a wild one. He had no experience, and he did not even know where to begin to look for such a horse. This horse must be something special, not just any horse that any brave might own. The youth had heard stories of a great horse to the south but surely those were just stories. There was no horse that he knew of that could live up to the descriptions he had heard. His only hope was that Fine Bull would know of such a horse.

Something in the air made Lame Bear stop. He inhaled deeply. It was the smell of smoke, campfire smoke! He stepped out of the trees and into the open. His first impulse was to run down the hill, giving his loudest victory yell, but he stopped himself. He must go to Fine Bull's lodge unseen. He longed for the sight of his father and his mother but he must wait. He found the shelter of some bushes and sat down to wait for the protective cover of darkness. Not even a dog must sense his presence as he approached the camp.

Thoughts of wild horses made the time go quickly. There was no moon tonight so the darkness was complete. Lame Bear looked up into the starfilled heavens and sighed. It was time to go. Carefully he worked his way down the hill, taking advantage of cover whenever possible. He halted at the edge of the camp, peering through the darkness to locate Fine Bull's tipi. When he found it, he moved quickly. This time he did not hesitate outside the entrance but slid under the flap in a flash. The tipi was filled with a soft glow from the dying fire.

"Welcome back, my son." It was the voice of the old man. Lame Bear realized wh[illegible] Fine Bull had been such a successful warrior. It was not easy to sneak up on him. He seemed to know everything; he did not miss a sound.

The old man took an ember from the coals and lit his pipe. "Sit down and tell me of your adventure." Putting the pipe to his lips, he took a puff. Then he handed the pipe to Lame Bear.

The youth drew long on the pipe, letting the smoke ease the tension of his body. Then he handed the pipe back to Fine Bull. There was a smile of approval on the old man's lips. Lame Bear did not know where to start. He cleared his throat.

"The journey to Thunder Mountain was long and hard. Near the end I wanted to give up. I sat down under a tree, and felt as if I would never rise again. Then a gray bird came and kept me company. He made me feel much better. I was able to continue my journey to the mountain. The bird stayed with me the whole time. Thunder Mountain was beautiful. I did not know anything on earth could be so wonderful. I went around the lake and did as you told me. I climbed as high as I could until I reached a ledge and there I stopped to wait for my vision. I do not remember much after that except that there was a terrible storm and the next morning such a heavy fog that I could barely see. Then . . . ."

"Yes, my son, go on. What happened then?" the old man asked.

Lame Bear blushed. He was afraid that Fine Bull would laugh at what he had seen. Then he remembered the hair in his medicine pouch and hurried on with his story. "I heard the sound of a horse running and a neigh. I could not figure out who it was. Then I saw one of the swift ones coming to me out of the fog. He had a message for me from the Earth Powers. He told me to find and to capture a horse that will bring me honor and glory. My spirit helper said that this horse will help me to become a great warrior among my people."

Lame Bear stopped. He was breathing hard. Suddenly he reached in his medicine pouch and brought out the hair. He handed it to Fine Bull. The old man took the hair and studied it carefully. He put it to his nose and smelled it. He was satisfied. "My son, this is good. The Earth Powers are wise. They sent the gray bird to give you courage and to comfort you in your loneliness. Without the bird you may never have reached

Thunder Mountain. Your vision is good. Now you must carry out the swift one's message. Tomorrow you must go in search of the great one mentioned."

"There is one horse," said Fine Bull. "You have heard stories of him. His range is to the south, in the land of the Flatheads. I only saw him once and that was during his first summer. He is a Medicine Hat. The Medicine Hats are sacred. The dark haired shield on their chest protects their rider. The dark hair over their ears and the top of their head represents a war bonnet. The one who rides such a horse in battle will never be wounded by the enemy."

The old man leaned forward and his voice was almost a whisper. "To get this horse will be difficult and dangerous. If the Flatheads catch you, they will kill you and capturing the stallion will be no easy task. Many great warriors have tried. Of course, there are many fine horses ranging in this country, and it would not be so dangerous for you to capture one of them."

"No, I must have the Medicine Hat," replied Lame Bear. "No other horse will do. I will get him or die trying."

Fine Bull got up to put more wood on the fire. "It is good. You will spend the night with me and tomorrow we will prepare you for your journey. First you must eat."

Lame Bear ate until his stomach bulged. Fine Bull grunted his satisfaction and lay down to sleep. Lame Bear lay down too, but sleep would not come to him. Somewhere to the south, in the land of the Flatheads, a young stallion neighed his challenge into the night.

Chapter VI

ALL FOR A HORSE

Lame Bear's sleep was deep. He became vaguely aware of someone touching him and talking to him. He tried to shut the voice out but it persisted. "Wake up. It is time to go. The camp will be stirring soon. Hurry!" Fine Bull's voice was urgent.

Lame Bear moaned and pulled his buffalo robe up over his head. Suddenly the robe was whipped from his body and the cold morning air brought him abruptly out of his dreams. "What is it? What has happened?" he asked. Then he remembered. His aching, tired body and the sight of Fine Bull brought it all back to him. He had just returned and now he must leave again. The thought made him groan softly.

Fine Bull looked at Lame Bear with understanding and compassion. "You are tired, but you cannot stay here. Someone will see you and tell your father. I will take you to a safe place where you can rest before your long journey. Come, we must get our horses and go."

Fine Bull and Lame Bear walked unnoticed out to the horse herd. Lame Bear started to whistle for his pinto mare but Fine Bull stopped him. "No, you must take one of my horses. Your pony would be missed and someone would start looking for you. There is my herd over there."

Lame Bear started in the direction that Fine Bull pointed. They walked quietly among the grazing horses. "You should take a mare," said Fine Bull. "She will help you win the big one's heart."

In the dim light it was difficult to distinguish individual horses. Finally Fine Bull spotted the horse that he wanted. She was nibbling daintily at the dew covered grass, not really hungry, just passing time until she could bathe in the rays of

the early morning sun. Fine Bull caught the mare and another horse for himself and led them quietly away from the herd. Gathering Lame Bear's belongings they left camp heading south.

After riding in silence for some time, Fine Bull spoke. "You have far to travel into unfamiliar country. Go south, cross the Belly River and keep going until you reach Chief Mountain. You will know it by its steep sides and flat top. Keep Chief Mountain on your right and ride until you come to Swift Current Creek. Follow the creek to it s headwaters. There you will see the pass through the mountains that will take you to the land of the Flatheads. The horse herd you are looking for ranges in the upper end of the Flathead valley."

Lame Bear rode on in silence beside the old man. He ran the words of Fine Bull over and over in his mind. It would be time wasted to get lost, and he would be short on time as it was. He had to get back through the pass before the fall snows closed it. This would give him three moons at the most. Lame Bear sighed. The task before him seemed impossible, yet he had no choice but to keep going.

It was mid-morning when Fine Bull headed his horse into an aspen grove. At the edge of a small, grassy glade inside the grove he pulled up. Dismounting, he turned his horse loose to graze. Lame Bear did the same after unpacking his provisions.

"We will stop here all day," Fine Bull said. "You need to let your body and mind rest. Tonight we will talk." The old man turned and walked away in search of a comfortable place to sit.

Lame Bear was grateful for this chance to rest. He walked out into the knee deep grass. There he stretched out full length in the bright sun. He fell into a deep sleep which lasted long into the afternoon. A hot breath on his cheek woke him. Opening his eyes, he looked up into the soft brown eyes of Fine Bull's mare. For the first time Lame Bear looked on her in real appreciation. She was made better than the average Indian

pony. She was taller, with clean, straight legs. Lame Bear liked her deep girth and broad chest. He doubted that there was a horse in the Flathead nation that could catch her in a life or death race. He was sure that this was one reason why Fine Bull had insisted he take her on his journey south.

Lame Bear liked her color too. She was a lined-back buckskin with no white markings. The mare would blend in well with her surroundings. Buckskins were also noted for their exceptional endurance qualities. Lame Bear was pleased. He passed his hand lovingly down the satin arch of the mare's neck. She responded by nibbling at the fringe on his leggings.

"You are a beauty," he said. "My heart swells with pride at the sight of you. With Fleet Foot as my helper and you beneath me I cannot fail. I wonder what Fine Bull calls you?"

"Her name is Fawn." It was Fine Bull. He had been watching Lame Bear and the mare. "As a foal she was very small. The way she pranced and danced she reminded me of a fawn. She is swift and wary like the deer. If you watch her you will never be caught by an enemy."

Lame Bear gave the mare a final pat on the neck. "Eat well and rest," he said. "Tomorrow we will start the long journey south."

Fine Bull and Lame Bear set up a camp for the night. The evening was spent in smoking good tobacco, eating wild meat and talking about Fine Bull's many adventures. Lame Bear gazed dreamily into the fire, his mind traveling miles away to the south. Tomorrow he would start his own adventure. The thought made his spine tingle. That night he stayed awake for a long time, staring up at the star-filled sky, his emotions swelling in his chest.

At the first hint of light, Lame Bear was up and packing his gear. Breakfast consisted of pemmican and water, and he ate in haste. Very little conversation passed between the old man and the youth. After the food was eaten Lame Bear caught the horses, giving the mare a close inspection. He was satisfied.

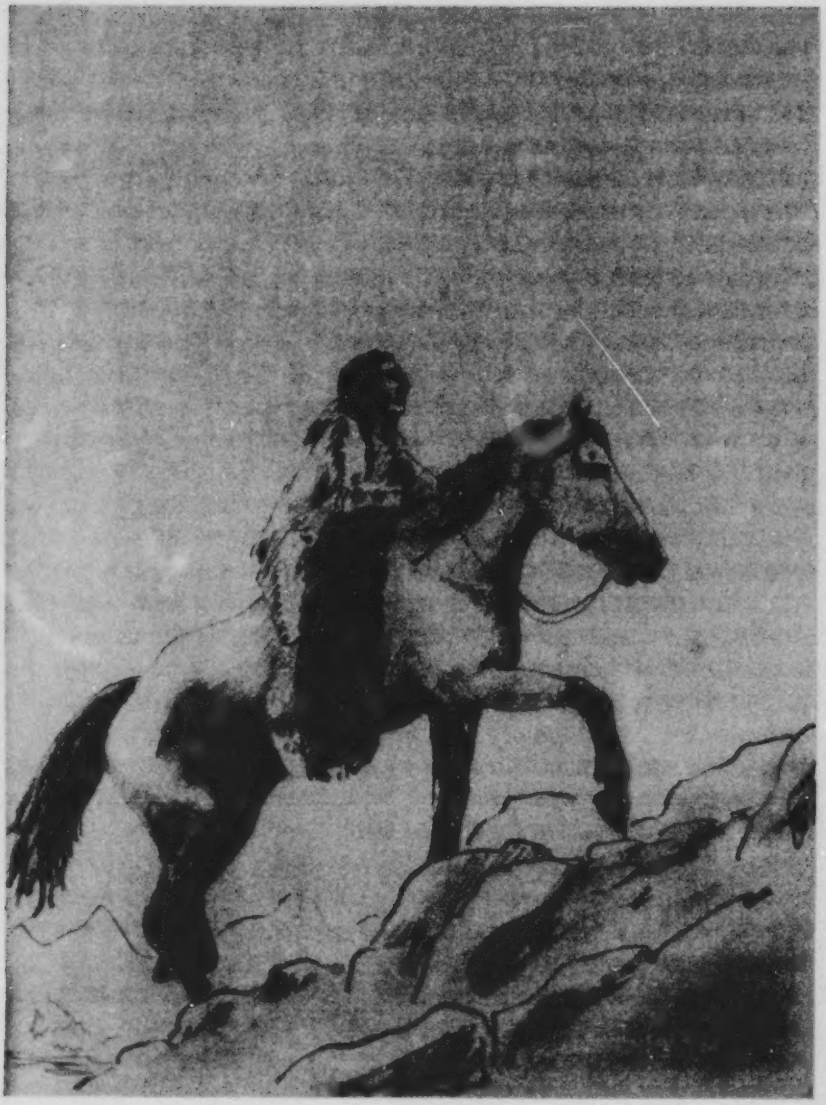
She was in top condition and eager to go. Lame Bear turned and faced Fine Bull. A look of mutual understanding passed between them and then Lame Bear was on the mare's back. Turning her south, he gave her a gentle squeeze with his legs. She moved into a ground-eating trot that would take him miles away before sunset. Fine Bull watched the departing figure of the youth until he rode out of sight, then he turned back towards the village.

This day was beautiful, with brilliant blue skies and a cool breeze that lifted Lame Bear's spirits. Very little escaped his searching eyes as he covered the miles south. The sun was not far above the horizon when he reached the Belly River. Lame Bear and Fawn crossed the river without incident and went on their way. Deer and elk were plentiful. It thrilled the youth to watch them as he rode along.

As the sun rose higher in the sky, Lame Bear began paying more attention to the landscape on his right. He was soon rewarded by the sight of Chief Mountain rising boldly up out of the surrounding hills. As Lame Bear rode by, he felt as if the mountain were watching him, sizing him up to see if he could accomplish the task before him. Sitting a little straighter, he hurried Fawn on her way, anxious to get the mountain behind him.

The trail took him into the foothills. Gradually he became aware of a distant, dull rumble. As Fawn leaned into the climb, the rumble grew into a loud roar. Suddenly the trail broke through the trees on to a bluff overlooking a deep gorge. The clear running waters of Swift Current Creek raged past Lame Bear. He marveled at the frothing, foaming energy of it. The youth followed the creek for the rest of the day. He had to make several detours in order to get around downed timber that was blocking the trail.

The western sky was turning a pinkish gray when Lame Bear broke timber line. He was met by a cold blast of air coming



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down from the snow fields that stay year round in the high country. Stopping Fawn, he reached down to unroll his buffalo robe and draw it around his shoulders. The mare was grateful for the chance to catch her breath. Lame Bear spoke as he patted her neck. "Today is just the beginning, girl. We will camp here tonight. We both need to be rested before we enter the land of the Flatheads."

Urging Fawn forward, Lame Bear scouted the slope leading to Swift Current Pass. Finally he found a good place to camp. It was a spot where the sheer rock wall of the mountain leaned out, creating an overhang with a cozy little hollow underneath. He unpacked his belongings and turned the mare loose to graze on the coarse high mountain grass. After a vigorous roll, she got up, shook herself, then settled down to graze. Lame Bear was glad to see that she had so much energy after their long, hard ride. As for himself, he felt completely drained of strength. It was time for him to get serious about eating also. He picked a spot where he could watch the whole slope and sat down to wait.

Lame Bear did not have to wait long. With the coming of evening, small animals began to move around in search of food. A rabbit appeared from behind a bush at the base of the cliff. Unsure of the horse, he poked his head out, then drew it back quickly. His ears and nose were in constant motion as he tested the air for any hint of danger. He did not see the still form of the youth, nor did the air carry any message of danger, so he hopped out into the open. The light was fading fast as Lame Bear made his move. "Sorry, little brother, but I need the strength that you can give me."

The youth's knife throw was swift and sure. The rabbit never knew what had hit it. Lame Bear returned to the overhang and built a small fire to roast the rabbit. One by one the stars began to appear, shining with a special brilliance in the thin mountain air. After finishing his meal, Lame Bear caught Fawn and tied

her to a small tree near the overhang. He then gathered enough bear grass to make a soft bed and, crawling under his buffalo robe, fell instantly asleep.

Lame Bear woke up to the sound of Fawn pawing the ground. She was cold and hungry and wanted to be turned loose. He threw back his robe sucking in his breath as the cold mountain air hit his warm body. "No wonder you are angry with me Fawn. It seems that winter is hiding in these high places."

Fawn tossed her head and began pawing and nickering. When Lame Bear turned her loose, she spent several minutes running and bucking just to get warmed up. As for himself, he hurried back to his bed and threw his buffalo robe around his shoulders. There was not time for a fire because he wanted to get an early start.

Sitting cross-legged under his robe, Lame Bear ate what was left of last night's rabbit. The eastern sky turned from gray, to pink, to gold, signaling that it was time for him to go. He gathered his belongings and caught his reluctant mare. As far as she was concerned, breakfast was not yet over. A sharper than usual nudge in the ribs from Lame Bear got her attention, and she settled down to the business at hand. Lame Bear headed for the notch in the rugged wall of mountains. This marked the entrance to Swift Current Creek Pass.

A half mile of rough trail brought them to the summit. Crossing over, they started down the other side. Lame Bear's heart began to beat faster at every step. He was now treading on enemy ground and the thought made him uncomfortable. He was not used to the idea of someone trying to kill him, nor could he picture himself killing anyone else. He smiled briefly as he thought of the Flatheads trembling at the sound of his name. Well, maybe someday, but now they would be shaking with laughter if they knew he was coming.

He heard a creek off to his right. The trail followed along the

water's edge most of the way down into the valley. This would make Lame Bear's job of finding the trail easier, but the gurgling of the rushing water might also muffle the sounds of an approaching enemy. Lame Bear paid special attention to Fawn, watching her ears as they flicked back and forth. Any change in her attitude would warn him of danger ahead.

As the shadows lengthened, Lame Bear looked for a place to camp. The trees were beginning to thin out and he did not want to camp too close to the valley. Then the trees parted before him, and he rode out on the shore of a mountain lake. He let Fawn drop her head to graze while he sat and admired the beauty before him.

The loud scolding of a squirrel caught his attention. He pulled Fawn's head up and nudged her to go. The trail skirted the edge of the lake. It was a long lake, and it took Lame Bear until dusk to reach its end. He did not want to camp near the trail so he crossed the outlet of the lake and rode around to the opposite shore. The youth went far back into the trees. There he dismounted and tied Fawn to a tree. Tonight he would pull grass for her. He could no longer risk letting her run free to graze. Lame Bear did not want to lose her, nor did he want her to be seen. In the morning he would scout for signs of Flathead hunting parties and most important, signs of movement among the wild horse herds.

Chapter VII

THE MEDICINE HAT STALLION

There was no hint of light in the eastern sky when Lame Bear got up. He set himself immediately to the task of pulling Fawn a large mound of grass. The fast pace that he was setting warmed him quickly. It was not long before Fawn was eating contentedly from the pile of grass which Lame Bear placed before her. Taking some dried meat from his pack, he sat down to a cold breakfast. He would leave as soon as the mare finished her feed.

The sky was filled with the golden glow of dawn when Lame Bear mounted Fawn. He rode back the way he came the night before. Crossing the outlet of the lake, he headed down the trail. Not long after leaving the lake, Lame Bear rode out into the Flathead valley. The creek that he was following led him to the Flathead River. He pulled Fawn up and studied the terrain before him. He decided to cross the river so that he could stay close to the range of mountains that he saw on the other side. He did not want to be caught out in the open if he could help it.

After crossing the Flathead, Lame Bear continued to follow it until its southern route started pulling away from the mountains. He reined Fawn away from the river and headed north. The youth had not forgotten what Fine Bull had told him. The horse that he was looking for was somewhere to the north.

Lame Bear spent the rest of the day exploring. He skirted the southern tip of the mountains, riding into and out of canyons and draws. His main concern at this point was to familiarize himself with the country. He took special note of good places to hide and to camp. He found old horse droppings on several

of the game trails that he explored and a few old campsites but nothing that indicated the presence of hunting parties this spring. The youth hoped that the Flathead hunting parties would not be coming this far north until the end of the summer. This would give him greater freedom of movement.

Lame Bear's third day of travel brought him to a smaller river that joined the Flathead. He followed it north, hoping to find a favorite watering place for game and horses. He was not disappointed. The river that he was following ran out of a large lake, which all but filled the entrance to a canyon. Lame Bear rode along the western shore of the lake, studying the ground carefully for fresh horse signs. A break in the canyon wall caught him by surprise. A passageway wide enough to run a herd of buffalo through led to the west, away from the lake. Lame Bear stopped, not sure where to go next.

After giving it some thought, the youth decided to follow the lake's tributary to its headwaters. He would come back in a few days to scout the passageway and whatever lay beyond. Lame Bear headed Fawn on up the canyon trail, all of the time hoping to see some signs of the wild horses. He made camp after a long day of strenuous riding. His body ached all over and his heart was sick with disappointment. He had not seen any sign of horses since he entered the Flathead valley. Maybe the whole thing was a big story, and he would have to return to his people in disgrace. He could not bear the thought of doing that.

Lame Bear stared into the flames of his small fire, his thoughts returning to his father's lodge. How he longed to see his father's strong face and his mother's warm smile. He could almost smell the wonderful aroma of wood smoke and cooking meat that filled his father's tipi. He wondered if they missed him and he wondered how Fine Bull was explaining his absence. Loneliness settled over Lame Bear like a dark cloud. A tear rolled down his cheek and dropped unnoticed on to

the back of his hand. The flames of the fire flickered and sputtered, then died. The glowing embers were reflected in the dark pools of Lame Bear's eyes, and for a moment the tortured soul of the youth twisted his handsome face in agony.

The emotions of the night were etched on the youth's face. He woke up cold and miserable. The sky was gray, promising rain. Fawn nickered softly and nuzzled his shoulder when Lame Bear brought her an armful of grass. He stroked her soft warm neck and leaned his head on her shoulder. "Maybe we should forget this crazy idea and go home. No, I could never go home like this. It would be better to ride south and never return than to face may father in shame."

The words spoken in bitterness and frustration poured out of the youth. The mare stood silently and listened. After awhile his emotions were spent and Lame Bear felt empty. He lost all sense of time and purpose. The mare grew restless and pulled away from him. Lame Bear stood staring at her; his mind off in another world.

Suddenly the silence was broken by the harsh call of a Camp Robber. At first Lame Bear did not notice the calling of the bird, but something deep within his memory prodded him back to the present. He had heard that call before. Then he remembered his little friend from Thunder Mountain. A smile wiped the gloom from his face.

"So little brother, you have come to cheer me up. It is good to see you again. Maybe you can tell me where the wild ones are hiding," Lame Bear said.

The Camp Robber sat listening to Lame Bear, cocking his head from side to side as the youth spoke. His little black eyes held a mischievous gleam. Suddenly the bird gave a squawk and flew down the trail. Lame Bear quickly mounted Fawn. He urged her to move as swiftly as possible after the bird. All of his gloomy thoughts from the night before were left behind as he became filled with a sense of excited expectation.

They reached the northern shore of the lake by mid-day. Lame Bear stopped Fawn and searched the forest for the Camp Robber. He soon spotted him up in a tree near the western passage. The bird sat preening his feathers, completely ignoring the youth.

Lame Bear spoke to him. "Are you playing games with me, little brother, or do you have something to show me?"

The bird stared at him, never blinking an eye.

"All right, be that way. I'll find them myself," he said.

Lame Bear dismounted in disgust. A rock that he stepped on gave way and he fell to the ground. The Camp Robber squawked and chattered. Lame Bear grinned sheepishly. Then he saw it! There on the ground next to his hand was a fresh horse track. For a moment he thought maybe it was Fawn's but a closer look showed him that it was too big to be hers. His heart pounded as he got up and searched the area for more tracks. He was soon rewarded by the signs of a milling horse herd. There were tracks going everywhere.

One track in particular caught his attention. The imprint made by the frog of the hoof was crooked. The bottom of the hoof had probably been cut badly when the horse was a colt, leaving it with a permanently deformed frog. Because of this track, the herd would be easy to follow and locate. He must find out now whether or not this herd was led by the Medicine Hat stallion.

Suddenly a loud clap of thunder opened up the skies. The rain began to pour down as the mountain storm got under way. Lame Bear mounted Fawn and begin circling, hoping to find which direction the herd had come from before the rain washed the tracks away. He was not too surprised when he found them heading into the western passage. Eagerly the youth urged Fawn into the gap in the mountains. He was so intent on following the horse tracks that he did not notice his rain-soaked buckskins sticking to his skin, nor his chattering

teeth.

The tracks of the wild herd led Lame Bear to the banks of the Still-Water River. There they turned north and followed close to the mountains. Lame Bear knew that the herd would be seeking shelter from the storm in one of the many draws running back into the hills. Rather than wear himself and Fawn out searching for them, he decided to seek shelter too and wait out the storm. The horses would come out to graze in the valley as soon as the storm blew over.

He turned Fawn into the first draw that he came to and stopped under a thick-boughed tree. In spite of the dampness that surrounded him, Lame Bear felt warm and happy. In a few hours he would know whether or not his search was in vain.

The storm ended as quickly as it had begun. The late afternoon sun broke through the clouds. A rainbow full of brilliant colors arced across the valley. Lame Bear inhaled the pungent wet smell of pine needles and earth. It filled him with vigorous energy. He swung his arms and flexed his legs to warm up his body and loosen the wet, sticky buckskins that he wore. He left Fawn tied to a tree and walked out of the draw to find a place where he could see as much of the valley as possible. The youth soon found a small knoll near the river. He climbed up and lay down so that he could peek over without being seen.

Lame Bear tried to keep his mind and eyes on the valley before him, but the sun's warmth soon made him sleepy. His mind wandered in wonderful dreams of victory until he dozed off into a blissful slumber.

Slowly a new sound began to penetrate his slumbering mind. It was a very familiar and soothing sound. For a moment Lame Bear thought that he was back in the Blackfeet camp tending his father's horses. It was the sound a grazing horse makes as its lips gather and its teeth tear a mouth full of grass.

Suddenly every nerve in Lame Bear's body came alive! He held his breath and listened. There was a grazing horse close by him. Then he heard the unmistakeable high pitched whinney of a foal and the deep throated answering nicker of its mother.

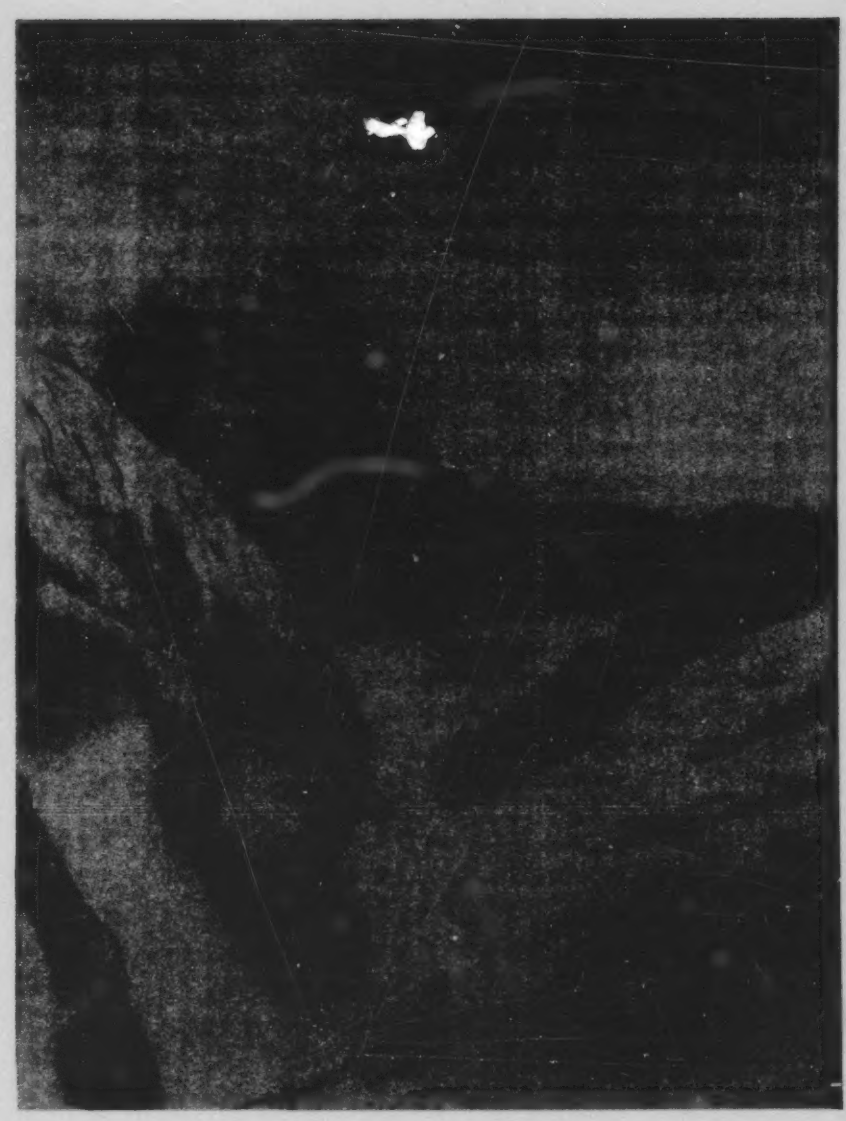
Lame Bear slowly inched his way forward so that he could look over the top of the knoll. He wanted to look, and yet he feared disappointment. When he could see, he had to blink several times to get the sleep out of his eyes and adjust them to the late afternoon light.

It took several moments for the youth to take in all aspects of the scene before him. Grazing on the lush green grass was a small band of mares and foals. Lame Bear was surprised at how few mares there were; yet, they were all horses that a warrior would be proud to own. The stallion that led this band had chosen his mares well.

Two foals broke away from the herd, bucking and playing. Lame Bear caught his breath. One of them was carrying the markings of a Medicine Hat! This band of mares must belong to the Medicine Hat stallion, but where was he?

Lame Bear knew that the stallion would not be grazing with the mares, but would be off by himself where he could watch for signs of danger. The youth looked everywhere but there was no sign of him. This worried Lame Bear. He knew that a range stallion could be as dangerous as a grizzly bear if he felt himself or his herd threatened. He had heard stories of stallions having to be killed before any horses could be taken from their herds. Lame Bear did not like being in the position of not knowing where the stallion was.

A loud warning snort froze the youth to the spot. He dare not move. The stallion was only a few feet behind him. He could hear the horse drawing in air through flared nostrils, studying the strange object in front of him. The stallion pawed the ground in frustration.



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Lame Bear knew that he had to do something to ease the horse's tension. This first meeting between himself and the Medicine Hat was very important. What he did in the next few moments would determine whether or not he would ever be able to gain the stallion's confidence. He began to talk to the horse.

"Easy proud warrior. I did not come here to hurt you. I want to be your friend. You are a great horse and your mares are very beautiful," he said.

At the first sound of the human voice, the stallion's ears flattened and the whites of his eyes showed dangerously. He snorted and stepped forward. Lame Bear swallowed hard and kept talking, trying to keep his voice steady and calm.

"You are a brave horse," he said. "It would be an honor for me to ride you on the war path. Together we could bring honor to my father's lodge. You would like my father. He is a wise and brave man."

Slowly the stallion began to relax. He flicked his ears back an forth, puzzled by this new sound. It troubled him, yet there was something soothing about it too. It was almost dark before the Medicine Hat dropped his head to take a mouthful of grass. Gradually he grazed away from Lame Bear and returned to his mares.

Lame Bear let his breath out slowly. He was totally drained of energy and his muscles ached from being in one position for so long. He rolled over on his back, letting the tension slowly ease from his body. The stars appeared unnoticed. Finally, remembering Fawn, Lame Bear forced himself to get up. She would be hungry and nervous from being tied up alone for so long. He must get her fed and watered. Then he must think of a way to capture the Medicine Hat stallion.

Chapter VIII

WAR CHIEF DECIDES

Lame Bear spent the next few days following the wild herd, learning their habits and patterns of movement. He stayed well out of sight so that he would not disturb their daily routine. However, he had a feeling that the Medicine Hat knew that he was there. Often the horse would leave his mares and disappear. Lame Bear was never sure where he went, but he had the feeling that the horse was watching him. This pleased him, for he wanted the wild horse to get used to him and his presence near the herd.

The Indian youth still did not know how he was going to capture and gentle the wild stallion. He could not use brute force. It would take much more than one boy to capture the Medicine Hat against his will. No, there had to be another way. Lame Bear just could not figure out what it was. For the time being, his only plan was to get the herd to accept him.

The first few times that he approached the horses they panicked and ran, led by a black mare. Lame Bear noticed that the black mare limped. She must be the horse with the injured hoof. The youth admired her intelligence. When leading the herd in their mad dash to escape him, she would always take them out into the open, away from places where there might be a trap. This mare had been chased by humans before and she knew all of their tricks.

Gradually the herd became less and less alarmed when Lame Bear and Fawn showed up on the horizon. They did not put much effort into their running. One day they did not run at all. The black mare gave a warning snort, which brought everyone to attention, but they held their ground. Lame Bear kept his eyes on the lead mare. As soon as she showed signs of making a

run for it he pulled Fawn to a stop. Lame Bear let Fawn drop her head and begin to graze. One by one the wild mares went back to their eating. The black mare was the last horse to start grazing again. She would grab a quick mouthful and then jerk her head up to watch the youth with her wary eyes.

Lame Bear felt tense and nervous himself. He knew that the Medicine Hat might charge him at any time. He doubted that Fawn could escape the stallion's charge and if the mare fell, he would be trampled to death. Whenever the stallion came too close to him, he would begin talking to him. The sound of his voice always calmed the wild horse.

"Hello, brave warrior. We meet again. We will be friends someday; you will see," Lame Bear would say. On and on the conversation went until the stallion returned to his mares.

After several weeks of this, both the stallion and Lame Bear relaxed. The youth decided that it was now safe to approach the herd on foot The next day he left Fawn tied to a tree and walked to the herd alone. Their reaction was one of complete panic. The black mare threw up her head, gave a warning whistle and bolted. The entire herd went with her. Lame Bear sighed his disappointment. He had hoped that his appearance on foot would not bother them. Now he had to go through the process of conditioning them to his presence all over again.

The youth spent another week walking to the horses until they stopped running from him. He would sit in the grass for hours, watching them and talking to them. He learned their different personality traits, and he could recognize their voices when they called to each other.

The foals were the first to get completely over their fear of Lame Bear. He would sit as still as a stone while one or two foals came up to him. It was fun to watch them work up their courage to come in and smell him. They would come with halting steps, necks out-stretched, nostrils flared, until one of them would shy away causing the whole bunch to wheel and

run. This continued for quite some time, until the little black and white Medicine Hat actually touched Lame Bear's sleeve with his muzzle.

He was the bravest in the bunch. Lame Bear held his breath, not wanting to break the magic of the moment. He could feel the foal's warm breath on his face and see the quizzical expression in the soft brown eyes. Without warning the colt grabbed a mouthful of leather and gave a hard tug. Lame Bear lost his balance and went sprawling, scattering baby horses in all directions. The youth lay in the grass laughing, happier than he had been in a long time.

In this carefree manner the days slipped by until it was mid-summer. Lame Bear still was not making any progress with the Medicine Hat Stallion. The horse tolerated Lame Bear's presence with the herd, but he would not allow the youth to come near him. The passing of time began to worry Lame Bear. If he did not do something soon he would lose all hope of taking the stallion. The very thought of failure made his stomach tie up in knots. He must do something, but what?

Lame Bear did not realize that it would be Fawn who would give him the help that he needed in winning the stallion. It was early morning and Lame Bear went to turn Fawn loose to graze. Instead of her usual welcoming nicker, she laid her ears back at him and swung her hindquarters in his direction. The youth stopped short, hurt by this strange rebuff from the mare. "Fawn, what is wrong? Are you sick or are you lonesome?"

His gentle voice was met by a sour look from the mare. She pulled roughly away from Lame Bear as he turned her loose. The youth was puzzled by this strange behavior. He remembered Fawn being moody a couple of times before, but nothing this bad. As Lame Bear thought back, his face lit up. Of course! The mare was simply coming into season. The nearness of the stallion, combined with her forced confinement had her nerves on edge. This accounted for her

cranky behavior.

An idea began to form in Lame Bear's mind as he recalled Fine Bull's wise words. He would use Fawn to win the great stallion's heart. If the horse would not let the youth approach, then Lame Bear would make the stallion come to him. The idea filled the youth with joy and he laughed out loud.

Lame Bear decided to put his plan into immediate action. He caught Fawn, who snorted her displeasure at having her breakfast interrupted, and led her out to the herd. Locating the stallion, Lame Bear went as close as he dared without causing the horse to leave. He stopped and hobbled Fawn's front legs. Then he took his shirt off and tied it around the mare's neck and walked away.

Fawn watched him leave but only for a moment. She turned to face the stallion, nickering softly to him. Lame Bear had left her upwind from the Medicine Hat. The wind soon brought her scent to the stallion. The soft nicker, combined with the strong scent of the mare got the horse's instant attention. His nostrils flared wide and with arched neck and dancing step he approached the hobbled mare.

Lame Bear watched in awe the beauty of the scene before him. The stallion danced around the mare, squealing and nickering. He was plainly puzzled by her immobility. He circled closer and closer until their noses touched. Then, catching Lame Bear's scent, the stallion wheeled and ran. But his desire for the mare kept bringing him back. He pawed the ground in his frustration. Finally he made a savage lunge at the mare, trying to drive her away from the horrible man scent. Fawn leaped awkwardly away, almost falling as the stallion hit her in his charge.

Lame Bear held his breath. He had not thought that the stallion might try to hurt her because of his scent. The youth drew an arrow and strung his bow. He knew that he would kill the Medicine Hat rather than let him harm the mare.

The Medicine Hat whirled to come at Fawn again. The mare stood wide-eyed, trembling in fear. Lame Bear's heart was in his throat. The stallion charged. Fawn crouched, ready to leap aside at the last moment. Lame Bear pulled back his bow string, his eyes focusing on a spot just behind the stallion's shoulder. But the arrow was never released. In mid-stride the Medicine Hat set himself and came to a sliding stop, then veered away from Fawn. Lame Bear slowly released the tension on the bow string and sighed his relief. He thought for sure that he saw the mare sigh her relief too.

The Medicine Hat spent the rest of the day courting Fawn. He was constantly tormented and perplexed by the presence of Lame Bear's shirt around the mare's neck. In desperation, he grabbed it in his teeth and tried to tear it from Fawn's neck. He nearly pulled the mare off her feet, but the shirt stayed. By the end of the day the shirt ceased to bother the stallion. That night Lame Bear returned with Fawn to his camp, feeling as if a great burden had been lifted from his shoulders.

Lame Bear went to the mare and took off her hobbles. He spoke to her as he patted her neck. "Well, mare, you did it. If we succeed in nothing else, at least you will have a fine foal to present to Fine Bull next Spring. You have served me well."

With one final pat on the mare's neck, he slipped his catch rope off over her head and released her. Fawn looked at him, not sure of his intentions.

"Go on, join the herd. You have earned a rest," he said.

The mare hesitated only for a moment before she wheeled away from Lame Bear and ran to join the herd.

As the days grew hotter, the wild herd moved into the canyons and draws to escape the heat and the flies. Their days were spent in the shade of trees where, head to tail, they fought the persistent deer flies and horse flies. In the cool of the evening they would move out into the open to graze.

Lame Bear was always near the horses. Game was plentiful so

he never had to go far to find food. The gooseberries and raspberries were starting to ripen also, which gave him a pleasant change of diet.

All of the youth's spare time was spent with the Medicine Hat. He would watch the horse for hours, learning his habits and reactions. The more that Lame Bear was with the horse, the more his admiration for him increased. He had all of the requirements of a great war horse; courage, speed, endurance and 'heart', that special something which enables a horse to go on even after he is physically exhausted. Lame Bear longed to sit astride the strong back and race the wind.

One day, as he was sitting on a side hill near the stallion, Lame Bear thought of a name for the wild horse. He spoke to the horse as he always did when he was with him.

"You need a name wild horse. I can not go on calling you 'horse' or 'Medicine Hat'. You need a proper name, something that will show you are special among horses. I will call you 'War Chief' because you are chief of all the wild horses and because your color markings make you a sacred war horse," he said.

Lame Bear sat back, pleased with the name that he had chosen for the wild stallion. "War Chief, do you like your name?" he asked.

The dozing horse raised his head slightly and shook it up and down. The stallion was only trying to rid himself of flies, but Lame Bear laughed delightedly. "Then 'War Chief' it shall be," said the grinning youth.

Every day Lame Bear worked his way closer to the wild stallion. As soon as the horse showed any agitation at his nearness, the youth would stop and sit down. He talked constantly to the stallion until his voice lulled War Chief into a state of complete relaxation. The youth's scent no longer seemed to bother the horse.

One day Lame Bear decided to push War Chief to the limit of

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his tolerance. He needed to know exactly how much he and the stallion could trust each other. He approached the horse in his usual fashion, but his time, when the stallion became nervous, he did not stop. Instead, the youth held out his hand and walked toward the horse's shoulder. War Chief was momentarily confused by this sudden change in routine. Lame Bear took advantage of the stallion's hesitation and with one quick fluid movement he was at the horse's side. War Chief gathered himself, ready to spring away but some invisible force seemed to be holding him next to the youth.

Lame Bear reached out and put his hand on the stallion's shoulder, talking softly to him all of the time. War Chief flinched at the unfamiliar sensation. It was more than he could take. He side-stepped quickly away from Lame Bear. The youth smiled. "That's all right, my friend. Soon you will learn to enjoy my touch," he said.

Lame Bear approached War Chief several more times during the day. Each time the stallion stood to be touched a little longer. The youth soon found the horse's itchy spots and he scratched them vigorously. Was Chief enjoyed this attention in spite of himself. He closed his eyes and stretched out his neck, his lips itching the back of an imaginary horse. In a moment of ecstasy, the stallion reached around and began nuzzling Lame Bear's shoulder.

Lame Bear chuckled. "There, you see, I am not so bad. I told you that you would learn to enjoy my touch. Now we can be friends."

Lame Bear began stroking the stallion all over, until the horse accepted his touch on any part of his body. He then walked to War Chief's head and blew his breath into the horse's nostrils. He did this as a form of introduction. Horses always sniff noses when they meet each other, and Lame Bear knew that this was a means of identification. He wanted War Chief to remember what he smelled like and to associate his

scent with kindness and friendship.

By evening they were still together. The youth was watching the sun set, his hand resting lightly on the stallion's crest. As the sun sank over the earth's rim, a distant neigh reached them, carried on the evening breeze. It sent a shiver through Lame Bear and made War Chief snort defensively. The neigh came again, this time louder. It was the warning neigh of the gray stallion, Fleet Foot!

Chapter IX
THE BLACK MARE

Lame Bear woke up the next morning feeling tired and edgy. He could not get the haunting neigh of Fleet Foot out of his mind. What did it mean? Perhaps his mind was playing tricks on him and it was only the wind that he heard. No, it had been Fleet Foot's neigh and it had been a warning. It was almost as if his spirit helper was trying to wake him out of his dream world and bring him back to reality.

The youth sat down on a log and began to think over his situation. The summer was coming to an end. The days were shorter and the evenings were cooler. It would not be long before the summer rain storms would turn to snow in the high mountain passes. He had to get out of the Flathead valley before this happened.

Also, he had come a long way in his relationship with War Chief, but he knew that the stallion was not ready to submit to him and there was no way that he could make the horse leave the valley against his will.

Lame Bear sighed and got up. He was really no better off than before and now his time in the valley was coming rapidly to an end. He did decide to do one thing and that was to catch Fawn and keep her with him. He knew that he would feel much better having her close at hand. A small seed of doubt had been planted the night before and it was prodding him into action. Lame Bear picked up his rope and headed out to the wild herd.

Fawn raised her head and nickered a greeting at Lame Bear's approach. She was glad to see him. His gentle touch and soft voice were always welcome. She did not try to pull away when he slipped his catch rope around her neck, and she followed

him quietly away from the herd. Lame Bear smiled and patted her softly on the neck.

"So, you are not the she-bear that you used to be. I have seen you standing in the sunshine dreaming. Is it motherhood that is on your mind?" he asked.

The mare put her nose in the middle of Lame Bear's back and gave him a shove. He laughed and, grabbing a hank of mane, swung up on her back. It was good to be together again.

Lame Bear was glad that he caught Fawn when he did. The Medicine Hat was growing restless. Each day he would push the mares farther north, not letting them graze all day as he used to do. Lame Bear would not have been able to keep up with them if he had been on foot.

The youth tried to spend some time with the stallion but the horse never stayed still for very long. He was always on the move, circling the herd and testing the wind. Lame Bear was not too concerned by War Chief's change in behavior. He thought that the coming of Fall might be making the stallion restless. However, his thoughts changed when the black mare began to behave differently too. Some unseen danger was making her extremely nervous. She would snatch a mouthful of grass then lift her head and test the wind. Both the black mare and the stallion kept a watchful eye to the south.

Lame Bear was perplexed by the nervousness of the two wild horses. He did some scouting around but could find nothing that might be making them nervous. It worried him that he could not locate the source of their uneasiness.

Then, one day, on one of his scouting trips the mystery was solved. It was early morning. Lame Bear had his eyes on the ground, looking for tracks or any other sign which would tell him of the presence of a stranger. Suddenly Fawn stopped, almost unseating her rider. Lame Bear tensed up, all of his senses alert. He breathed in deeply, and smelled smoke. And there it was, barely visible, a thin wisp of smoke rising above an

aspen grove by the river. The youth quickly reined the mare around and rode back into the trees.

Lame Bear was worried. He was sure that the smoke coming out of the aspen grove was made by a Flathead campfire. He had to find out now how many people there were and what they were doing here.

After tying Fawn well back in the trees, the youth approached the aspen grove as close as he could without losing cover. He watched and waited. The Flatheads must never see him, nor even suspect his presence in the valley, but he must know everything about them.

Lame Bear's patience was soon rewarded. Not long after the smoke ceased rising through the trees six men rode out of the grove. They were mounted on the Flathead's best horses. The youth noted immediately that this was not a war party. Neither the horses nor the men were painted for war. Well, at least they were not looking for trouble. This thought made Lame Bear feel a little better about their presence in the valley.

If this was not a war party, then they must be a hunting party out looking for fresh meat. All that Lame Bear had to do was keep out of sight until they left the valley, and he would have no problems. However, something about their appearance bothered the youth. All of the members of the hunting party were carrying rawhide ropes. What was it they were hunting? Then the awful truth struck Lame Bear. This was no ordinary hunting party. These men were after the horses!

A terrible blackness swept over the youth. He felt the earth falling away beneath him. "Fleet Foot, Fleet Foot, where are you? Help me, please!"

It was so terribly quiet. The whole world seemed to be holding its breath, waiting to see what was going to happen. War Chief and the black mare had known all along that the Flatheads were coming. They had known for weeks.

The men riding north along the river, were soon out of sight.

Lame Bear ran as fast as he could back to where he had tied Fawn. He stumbled and fell several times in his frantic dash for the mare. With pounding heart and spinning head he climbed on Fawn's back and headed north too. He galloped headlong through the trees, dodging and weaving to miss branches. He had to reach the horses before the Flatheads found them. Somehow he must hide them from the horse hunters.

Lame Bear underestimated the speed at which the hunting party was able to travel. By the time he reached the herd's location the Flathead riders had surrounded the wild horses and were beginning to close in a half circle that would force the herd to run south, back down the valley. Lame Bear wanted desperately to warn the horses of the approaching danger but his position made it impossible. It would be foolish to reveal himself now that the trap was already being sprung on the herd. He looked on in helpless frustration, not hearing the sob that was wrenched from his throat.

War Chief was first to sense the herd's danger. His warning snort brought every horse to attention. The stallion plunged into the herd, scattering mares and foals before him. He headed for the black mare. She saw him coming and bolted to escape his teeth. Several mares followed her. The Medicine Hat's charge came too late. Before the herd could gather momentum the Flathead riders came charging down on them. Their blood curdling yells totally unnerved the horses. The leading mares skidded to a stop, then wheeled around to charge back into their followers. Total chaos resulted and in a few moments the herd was circling in confusion. War Chief dashed frantically in and out of the herd, biting and kicking, trying to force the mares north.

Only the black mare held to her original course of flight, making a desperate dash for freedom. Two of the horsemen realized her intentions and swung their mounts into the path of her escape, cutting her off. She swung away but the riders pressed her hard, forcing her to run back into the herd. The black mare never broke stride as she shot through the milling

horses and broke out the other side, heading south. The other horses followed her example and soon the whole herd was running down the valley.

Lame Bear swung Fawn around and kicked her into a run. He knew that he would not be able to keep up with the wild horses but he wanted to stay as close to them as possible. He was hoping the herd could out last the Flathead ponies in what he knew would be a strenuous run. Their only hope was that they were fresh and riderless. For now, he must concentrate on guiding Fawn through the trees at breathtaking speed.

The Flathead riders pushed the herd hard, using their own horses as if they had endless stamina. Surely they could not hold the pace much longer. But these men were experienced horse hunters and they had come prepared. Just as the herd reached the aspen grove, the riders dashed into the trees, dismounted their exhausted horses, pulled their headgear and mounted the six fresh horses they had left behind this morning. They would come back later for the other horses.

All of this took place in only a few moments. The wild herd never knew that they had been left so soon were the riders back in full pursuit. When the herd showed signs of slowing down the riders moved in on them, forcing them to speed up. The fast pace was beginning to tell on the older mares and the foals. One by one they began to drop out of the race, coming to shakey stops to stand, legs spraddled and sides heaving. The men rode on by them for they were after only the swift and the strong.

The wild herd's mad dash for freedom was coming to an end. Only a few horses were still running strong. The riders began shaking out their loops, eying the herd to see which one of the horses they wanted for their own. The little Medicine Hat caught the eye of one of the hunters. He was the only foal still running with the herd. He was matching his mother stride for stride, little neck out-stretched, nostrils flared to a brilliant red, foam flying from his sweat-drenched body and running his heart out. Admiration for the foal's courage filled the Flathead

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with desire. He must have the foal!

The black mare saw him coming. Doubling her efforts, she veered sharply to the left, heading for the gap which was now near at hand. Her baby stayed right with her. The hunter followed in swift pursuit, not quite sure what to do next. He wanted to rope the foal, but if he did, chances were that the black mare would turn on him to defend her baby. The man had no desire to take on the fury of the wild mare.

To rope the mare was useless. She was a bad one. Over the years many men had tried to catch her. The ones who had managed to rope her wished they had not. She was wise, independent and dangerous. One might as well put his rope on a wild mountain cat as to catch the black mare. Even if she were captured successfully, she would never adapt to captivity. Anyway one looked at it, the black mare was more trouble than she was worth.

The Flathead's mind was made up. He must have the Medicine Hat foal, and he knew what he had to do to get it. The three horses were now in the passageway, running slower because of the rougher terrain. The rider took advantage of the slower pace. Putting his catch rope under his knee, he removed his bow from across his shoulders and drew an arrow from his quiver.

The black mare broke from the gap and headed straight for the lake. The Flathead moved his horse in on the mare and drew along side of her. For a moment his eyes met hers. She had wild eyes that were rimmed in white and filled with hate.

The arrow was strung, the bow was drawn, and in one terrible moment the deed was done. The arrow made a dull sickening thud as it entered the mare's rib cage. She took it in silence. With one last great effort the black mare gathered herself and leaped into the lake. There was a brief moment of struggle, then all was still; the black body floating gently to the surface of the water.

When the Medicine Hat foal reached the shore of the lake, he froze, exhausted and confused. His flight had been

directed solely by his mother, and now that she was gone, he was completely lost. With his senses dulled by the blood pounding in his ears and the searing pain in his lungs, the rawhide rope settled unnoticed around the foal's neck. The war bridle was in place before he became aware of the man. The little horse made a feeble attempt to escape, but the man's strength and the painful pressure of the halter were too much for him. In a few minutes he was leading like a gentle horse but the Flathead was not fooled. He knew that as soon as the foal regained his strength and wind, he would fight like a wild cat. The warrior smiled in anticipation of the battle. This little horse was well worth the sore muscles and bruises he knew he would get before he had him mastered.

By the time the Flathead warrior returned with the Medicine Hat foal, the other hunters had made their catches too. Only two of the riders remained and they were in hot pursuit of War Chief. The brave stallion darted and dodged away from their ropes, finding extra bursts of speed from deep within his soul. But he was at a disadvantage running against two fresh horses. War Chief had escaped the Flatheads season after season. By now they knew all of his habits and tricks. They were determined not to lose him this time.

Finally one of the riders rode in to distract the stallion while the other one closed in from the other side. An expertly thrown loop settled over War Chief's head. Before the stallion had a chance to charge his captor, a second loop ensnared his front feet. Both men brought their horses to a quick stop and braced themselves for the horse's impact when he hit the end of the ropes. The result was a sudden and terrible fall for War Chief.

The stallion fought as hard as he could with what little strength he had left, but the rope around his neck was being drawn tighter and tighter. War Chief gasped and gulped, trying in vain to draw air into his lungs. His head pounded and the earth spun as blackness blocked out his senses.

As soon as the stallion went limp, the rider who had

forefooted him, leaped off of his horse and ran to War Chief's head. As quickly as possible he fashioned a war bridle with his rope and remounted his own horse. The other rider immediately gave the stallion slack so that he could get air.

War Chief did not move for a long time. All of his attention was focused on the simple process of breathing. At last the stallion came to his feet with one violent lunge. His tormentors had him cross-tied between the two ropes. When he charged the rider on his right, the terrible choking returned and when he charged the rider on his left, the pressure from the war bridle brought sharp pain to his mouth and behind his ears.

The stallion soon learned the lesson of the rope. It was useless to resist its terrible pressures. The two Flathead riders had War Chief under control. They looked at each other and both of them cut loose with a triumphant war whoop. For now, theirs was the victory.

Chapter X

IN THE ENEMY'S CAMP

The trees and the rough terrain caused Lame Bear to lose sight of the wild herd and their Flathead pursuers. He was frantic with worry, but his most important concern was to keep Fawn from hurting herself or from becoming exhausted. He knew that their severest test was yet to come. They would both be required to give their best and more. Finally, impatience got the best of the youth. He decided to take the risk of being seen for the sake of easier traveling. He turned the mare out of the trees and down into the valley.

Lame Bear soon came upon the exhausted stragglers from the herd. They were too tired even to raise their heads as he passed by them. The sight filled the youth with sadness. He felt especially sorry for the foals. Not only were they physically spent, but they had the added emotional stress of being separated from their mothers. They were old enough to be weaned, but left alone, Nature would have been more gentle. Most of them would probably find their mothers within a few days, but still, the sight of them was pathetic.

Fawn's steady canter soon brought them close to the aspen grove where they first saw the Flathead warriors. Lame Bear's heart sank when he spotted the six Flathead ponies grazing nearby. The sweat marks on their backs had not completely dried yet. Any hope that the youth had for the horses was now gone. He urged Fawn on, anxious to find out what had became of the herd.

The shadows were lengthening when Lame Bear came upon more members of the herd. They were grazing and resting near the river. As soon as they recovered their strength, they would head north, picking up stragglers as they went.

Lame Bear kept count of the horses as he rode down the valley. So far they were all there except for War Chief, the black mare, her foal, a buckskin, a roan and a bay. He knew that it would take more than one man to handle War Chief or the black mare, so one of them must have escaped. He hoped that it was War Chief; yet he knew that the Flatheads would give up all of the other horses before they would let the stallion escape again.

Speaking to Fawn, he said, "These Flatheads are not fools. They have taken the best of the herd. Now we will see if they can keep them."

Lame Bear dismounted and began searching the ground for signs of what had happened. He figured that the Flatheads had a camp to the south, but he needed to know for sure. In the morning they would be coming back for their extra horses. Whatever he was going to do, he had to do it before morning. He had to act now, while the men and their horses were exhausted from the day's work.

In his search the youth soon found a spot where a terrific struggle had taken place. The earth was torn up in a great circle and then he saw where the horse had fallen. What horse had fought so hard? In his heart, Lame Bear knew, but his mind was not willing to accept the idea. Tracks showed that the struggling horse was being forced southward.

Lame Bear took Fawn to the river for a quick drink, then mounting, he headed south at a brisk trot. He hoped to find the Flathead camp before night fall but darkness closed in around him, forcing him to slow his pace. Lame Bear had to move carefully, for fear of blundering into the Flatheads. He must be able to catch them off guard if his plan was to succeed.

Lame Bear rode close to the river, counting on its noise to cover up any sounds he was making. He figured that the horsemen would have their camp somewhere near the fresh running water. He figured right. Up ahead he saw the flickering light of a campfire. Soon the smell of camp smoke

and roasting meat reached his nostrils. The hot pain in his stomach reminded Lame Bear that he had not eaten all day. However, his discomfort was soon forgotten as he thought of the task before him.

Lame Bear dismounted and tied Fawn in a clump of willows. He was not worried about her calling out to the other horses. She started eating the tender parts of the willows immediately. The youth smiled. "Eat and rest. Soon there will be little time for either."

Lame Bear left the mare and proceeded along the bank of the river. First he must locate the six warriors before he could do anything about the horses. And there they were, as he hoped they would be sitting around the fire eating fresh roasted meat. They were not expecting any trouble. No guard was posted. They were telling stories and occasionally they would laugh at each other's wild adventures. Being relaxed and full of good food the men were soon spreading out their buffalo robes.

Waiting came hard, but Lame Bear made sure that the Flatheads had plenty of time to sink into a deep slumber before he made his next move. Crawling on his stomach, he moved in closer to the camp. In the darkness it was hard to locate the horses. Then, he heard a plaintive little nicker from out beyond the camp. Lame Bear recognized it immediately as the Medicine Hat foal. He waited for an answering nicker to come from the black mare but it never came. Lame Bear wondered where she was.

Lame Bear hurried along the bank of the river, anxious to find the rest of the missing horses. It was hard to see in the darkness, but he finally spotted their dark forms. There were eleven of them, six Flathead ponies and five of the mustangs. War Chief and the foal were the easist to see because of their white markings.

Now that he had the horses located, Lame Bear was not quite

sure what to do with them. They were all wearing hobbles and the wild ones had a rope running from their hobbles to a strong stake in the ground. He knew that they would go crazy with fear if he went close enough to cut them loose. The only wild horse that he had any chance of getting close to was War Chief, but first he must turn the Flathead ponies loose.

The Flathead horses were grazing quietly in a bunch by themselves. Lame Bear approached them slowly, talking softly to reassure them. He took out his knife and moved swiftly from horse to horse, cutting the hobbles as he went. Then quietly, Lame Bear started herding them southward. Even though they were tired and hungry he knew that their instinct to head home was strong. He was not disappointed. Soon they broke into a trot that would take them far away by morning. For now his enemies were on foot.

All of this time sharp eyes were watching the youth. War Chief was poised, ready to attack the two legged creature if he dare come near enough. The stallion was worked up into a rage. He hated the ropes and he hated the men who used them. Most of his strength was returning with the few hours of rest and food that he had had since the Flatheads made camp. However, he learned his lesson well. He was not about to let that rope down him again. He would wait for his chance and then he would strike.

Lame Bear worked his way back up along the river bank. He made a hard decision. He would free only War Chief, leaving the others behind. He must leave the foal. The stress of another hard run would kill him. As for the other three horses, he knew that their fighting and struggling would wake up the Flatheads before he could ever cut them loose. It was not worth the risk he would have to take. Freeing War Chief would be dangerous enough.

The youth circled around the stallion, stopping when he was upwind from him. He wanted to make sure that his scent

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reached the horse long before he did. War Chief never took his eyes off of Lame Bear as he circled him. His nostrils were flared, drawing at the breeze, trying to pick up the enemy's scent. He was standing half crouched, ready to charge as soon as Lame Bear came in reaching distance. His eyes were blazing and his muscles were quivering in anticipation.

Approaching in the dark, Lame Bear was unaware of the stallion's intentions. His courage would have failed him if he had seen the horse's terrible expression. He had total faith that War Chief would accept him. It was this blind faith that would save his life. The youth was counting on his past friendship with the horse to overcome War Chief's fear.

Walking slowly, with his hand outstretched, Lame Bear came to the stallion. "Take it easy proud warrior. I want to help you. I want to be your friend. Tonight we can bring honor to the Blackfeet people. Oh, please do not fight me!"

Lame Bear was now in easy reach of War Chief, but the stallion did not move. His instinct was telling him to fight; yet this was the voice of a friend and this human's scent brought back gentle memories of his mares and of his peaceful valley. Gradually the stallion's muscles relaxed and his stance straightened. He stretched out his neck and sniffed gently at the outstretched hand.

Lame Bear sighed his relief. "So we are still friends. Now we will see how deep your friendship goes."

Lame Bear stroked War Chief's neck. He was glad to see that the Flatheads left the war bridle on the stallion. As hard as it was to think of, he was still thankful for the lesson that they gave War Chief about ropes. It was making his job much easier.

Taking the lead rope in one hand, Lame Bear reached down with his other hand and quickly cut the hobbles loose from the stallion's front legs. Then he pulled on the lead rope, praying that War Chief would not fight him. With the first tug on the

rope War Chief threw up his head and rolled eyes, resisting the pressure of the bridle. The youth spoke softly, encouraging the horse to follow him. A second tug and War Chief took a few hesitant steps forward. After several more tugs on the lead rope, the stallion was following obediently at Lame Bear's heels.

His plan was working well, almost too well. Lame Bear was thankful, but he could not believe that his good fortune would last forever. His enemies were without horses and he at last had his beloved stallion by his side. What could go wrong now? No sooner had the question flashed through the youth's mind than he got an immediate answer.

Lame Bear was leading War Chief close to the river bank and was in sight of the willows where Fawn was tied. A soft gentle breeze was blowing their way, bringing the mare's scent to the stallion. Lame Bear, lost in his thoughts, was not paying attention to the breeze or the horse. War Chief caught Fawn's scent and neighed loudly. Fawn, glad to hear a friend, whinnied high and shrill. The four horses back in the Flathead camp, seeing that they were being left, neighed their desperate reply. For a moment all was quiet and still, then the night exploded.

Almost as one man, the six Flathead warriors were on their feet, weapons in hand. Lame Bear heard them calling to each other in an unfamiliar tongue. The confusion in their voices soon turned to anger as they discovered the cut hobbles and their horses gone. Their angry shouts spurred the youth to action. He ran to where Fawn was tied, and freeing her, tried to mount, but the two excited horses were making it impossible. Fawn kept turning to face the stallion and with War Chief prancing around it was all the Lame Bear could do to hang on to him. Finally, in fear and desperation, he jerked as hard as he could on their bridles, causing them both sobering pain. Lame Bear took advantage of the pause in their excited behavior to

get mounted. He pulled Fawn sharply around and kicked her into a trot, not daring a faster gait for fear that War Chief would get out of control.

The Flathead warriors gathered around their fire in helpless frustration. There was not a horse in camp that they could ride in pursuit. They did not even have an idea who they were going to pursue, or how many there were, or what direction they should take. The whole situation was very humiliating. All the they could do was wait until morning before the mystery could be solved.

In the hours left before dawn, Lame Bear put many miles between himself and the Flathead camp. He hoped to have a whole day head start on his pursuers. He needed some time to rest Fawn and War Chief and to plan what he should do next.

The youth rode along the Stillwater River until he reached the passageway through the mountains. He headed the horses into the gap. Because he was familiar with the country, he decided to return to the lake and then follow along the mountains to where he had crossed the Flathead. From there he would head for Swift Current Creek Pass and the trail home.

The night had been cold. Lame Bear was chilled, exhausted and hungry. He wanted more than anything just to lie down and sleep for a few hours. The horses were tired, too, after their night long trek. They were almost to the lake when a sudden eruption of scavenger birds startled them out of their exhausted stupor. Fawn stopped so suddenly that Lame Bear almost fell off. War Chief became alert and defensive.

Lame Bear spoke to reassure himself and the horses. "Easy now. Those birds are just feeding on some poor deer that the coyotes have downed. We have nothing to fear."

The youth urged his horse forward. They soon broke out on the shore of the lake. The sight before him caused Lame Bear's stomach to heave. He slid weakly from Fawn's back and walked over to the body of the black mare which had washed

up into shallow water. Leaning over, he grabbed the shaft of the arrow which had pierced the mare's side and snapped it off. He studied the markings of ownership. Lame Bear wanted to burn them into his brain.

He stroked the once proud neck as he spoke. "I will never forget you black mare. Someday, I will meet the man who made this arrow and I will make him pay for this terrible thing."

Lame Bear closed his eyes tight to squeeze back his tears. He stood up and threw the broken arrow far out into the lake. The youth returned to his horses. Wearily he mounted Fawn and headed south along the lake's shore. He never looked back.

Chapter XI
ESCAPE

As soon as there was enough light to see by, the Flathead warriors went to work. One man headed south on the trail of the six Flathead ponies. There was some hope that the horses might stop to graze long enough for a swift runner to catch up with them. One man stayed in camp to take care of, and guard the horses that were still there. They could not risk losing any more horses. The remaining four men headed north.

The Flathead warriors followed Lame Bear's tracks to where he left Fawn tied in the willows. After studying all of the signs they determined that they were raided by only one man. The Flatheads were amazed that one man was able to cut loose and control the Medicine Hat stallion. This man was truly a worthy adversary. Another thing that bothered them was the size of the footprints they were tracking. They looked more like those of a youth than of a grown man and one foot came down crooked. They could not accept the idea that the night raid was carried out by a youth. Surely they were on the trail of a rather small but courageous warrior.

The four men broke into a jog. They were in excellent condition and used to traveling in this manner. By mid-morning they came upon the six ponies that they had turned loose in the aspen grove. In his excitement Lame Bear forgot that these horses would be heading home too.

The Flathead warriors rejoiced at their good fortune. The men walked up to the horses very carefully. The horses were reluctant to be caught but experience had taught them that it was futile to resist. Soon the four warriors were mounted and on their way. They took the other two horses along in case they

might need them. Their mood was light. The lone horse thief could not escape them now!

Lame Bear was riding in a state of numbness. He had given Fawn her head and was concentrating on staying on her back. He ached all over and his bad leg throbbed painfully. The mare traveled south along the lake's shore. When they reached its outlet both horses stopped. The lush grass and their exhaustion brought them to a halt. Lame Bear did not dismount, Fawn reached around and sniffed at his foot, then, taking the moccasin in her teeth she began pulling. The sensation of losing his balance brought Lame Bear to his senses. He dismounted and sank gratefully into the lush grass. The horses would not wander away. They were too tired and hungry. He had more than a half a day's head start on his enemies. Besides, they were on foot. He would rest only a few hours and then would be on his way again. Feeling safe with these thoughts, Lame Bear sank into a deep, deep sleep.

It was cold, so cold. Where was his buffalo robe? If only his mother would let him sleep a little longer. His leg hurt and it was such a long walk out to the horse herd. Lame Bear tossed and turned, not wanting to give up his sleep, but it was cold and his belly was on fire. Reluctantly the youth opened his eyes and then he remembered. He was not at home in his father's lodge, but in a hostile land, alone and hungry.

Lame Bear sat up slowly, rubbing his eyes. Sometime during his sleep the sky had clouded up. The clouds were not the big white thunderheads of a summer storm. They were the solid gray mass of a cold front coming down from the north, and the wind had a bite to it. Lame Bear knew from experience that this storm was going to leave snow in the high mountain passes. He also knew that he had to ride hard before he would reach Swift Current Creek Pass. He did not know if he could beat the storm but he had to if he wanted to see his home again.

The two horses were grazing where the youth had left them.

Lame Bear was glad to see that they were looking good after their rest and fill of feed and water. This would be their last good feed before he could get them home.

Lame Bear had slept much longer than he had intended. It was late afternoon and would soon be dark. He needed to get food and the horses could use the rest, so he decided to make camp for the night. He did not want to take a chance of losing the trail in the dark. The Flathead hunters would have to make camp for the night too. They would not be able to catch up with him on foot nor could they follow his trail in the dark. The youth felt safe enough to relax his guard and tend to his most immediate need, food!

The Flathead warriors followed Lame Bear's trail at a steady trot. With each mile they grew more curious about their strange adversary. He was not traveling fast and he was not trying to cover his trail. Either he was very brave or very foolish. They were even more surprised when the trial entered the passageway to the lake. The men knew this part of the country well. Taking the trail to the lake made no sense for it led nowhere.

They proceeded with caution as they approached the lake. They were hoping to catch the horse thief off guard. The sudden flight of a flock of scavenger birds startled them and shattered their hope of surprise. One warrior went ahead on foot as a scout. A sharp whistle soon let the others know that it was safe to approach the lake.

The Flatheads studied the tracks on the ground carefully. Here was another mystery. Why would anyone show so much interest in the body of the black mare? No man had ever touched her and she had always made trouble for the horse hunters. This man had pulled the arrow from her body. Again the warriors were puzzled. They talked among themselves for some time without coming to any conclusions.

Darkness and a storm were closing in on the mountains. The

four men decided to make camp in the shelter of the trees. They had come far and the freshness of the tracks indicated that their adversary was not very far ahead of them. They could rest all night and catch up with him easily the next day. The Flathead warriors went to sleep that night sure of their success.

After a hearty meal of mountain lake trout, Lame Bear tended to his horses. He checked them carefully for sore muscles and injuries. After careful inspection the youth was satisfied that his horses were strong and ready for more hard riding.

With the storm coming in, Lame Bear decided to tie the horses up for the night. It would be disasterous to lost them now. War Chief fought violently when he found himself tied to a tree. However, after seveal moments of furious struggle, he realized that the rawhide rope and the tree were stronger than he was. Watching him, Lame Bear was glad that he was not on the other end of War Chief's lead rope. He could not help but wonder what was going to happen the first time he tried to ride the stallion. It was a thrilling and, at the same time, a frightening thought. He had seen many of his friends get thrown from the backs of untamed horses. The youth knew that it was a painful and occasionally fatal experience. He hoped that when the time came he would have the strength to master War Chief.

As soon as the horses were settled down for the night, Lame Bear wrapped himself in his buffalo robe and found shelter from the wind. It was not long before he fell asleep.

At first Lame Bear thought that it was the wind. He drew his robe closer around himself and tried to get back into his sleep. There it was again! The youth lifted his head and strained to hear. The wind was blowing cold and hard. His ears must be playing tricks on him. No, this time he heard it clearly. The urgent warning neigh of a stallion. His first thought was that War Chief was in trouble, but that was not War Chief's neigh.

Lame Bear held his breath, waiting. It came again, loud and long, sending a chill down the youth's spine. There was no mistaking it now, it was Fleet Foot, his spirit helper and his message was clear. The Flatheads must be very near!

There was barely a hint of light in the eastern sky. Lame Bear gathered his belongings and hurried to where the horses were tied. They greeted him with anxious nickers. The youth allowed them only a short drink, not wanting their bellies to be heavy with water. Then he mounted Fawn and headed down the trail at a brisk trot.

By mid-day Lame Bear had covered half the distance to Swift Current Creek Pass. He was watching his back trail carefully hoping to catch a glimpse of his pursuers. He knew that they were close but he needed to know how close. The clouds were lowering and the wind was picking up. The storm would break soon. Lame Bear was running out of time.

The Flathead warriors were mounted and on the trail south as soon as there was enough light to see the tracks that they were following. When they were sure of the direction Lame Bear was taking, they broke their horses into a steady canter. They soon reached the place where Lame Bear had made his camp. The excitement of the four riders mounted when they realized that their man was not very far ahead of them. They talked excitedly and one man pointed to the south. They urged their ponies on, stopping only when they became unsure of the trail.

As the day wore on, the trail that had been taking the Flatheads south, turned northeast and the men began to suspect that they were on the trail of a Blackfeet. It would bring them great honor to count coups on such a brave warrior and to get their horses back. They hurried on, wanting to catch the Blackfeet before the storm broke.

Lame Bear heard the Flathead warriors before he saw them. They broke from the timber with a victorious yell. The youth

looked over his shoulder then dug into Fawn's sides. She bounded forward and in a few strides was running hard, War Chief by her side. The mare's incredible speed soon put them out of danger but Lame Bear knew that she could not keep this pace for long. This was her third day of hard riding, with very little rest. Lame Bear recognized the six horses from the aspen grove. Besides being in good shape, they were well rested too. Lame Bear knew that it was only a matter of time before the Flatheads caught up with him.

The Flatheads were surprised by the buckskin mare's speed. She would be a great prize to capture. They were more determined than ever not to let their adversary escape. The warriors wanted to end the chase before their horses began to tire. They did not want to take any chances on how good the buckskin mare might be so they decided to send the two best riders ahead on the two unridden horses. The chosen riders moved their horses up beside the fresh mounts and in one fluid movement, changed horses. The Flathead horses, responding to the command, lengthened their stride and began closing the gap between themselves and the rider in front of them.

Fawn was beginning to tire. She was drenched with sweat and little flecks of foam were flying from her mouth. At this pace she would soon be running on heart alone. Lame Bear would let himself be caught before he would take the chance of running the mare to death.

Lame Bear looked back and saw only two riders. They were closing fast. In an instant he realized what the Flatheads had done. His heart sank. Fawn could never outlast their fresh horses unless . . .No, it was impossible. He could never do it, but for Fawn's sake he had to try. Lame Bear looked over at War Chief. He was running strong, showing no signs of stress. He was truly a great horse.

They were almost to the Flathead River. Lame Bear decided

to switch horses while they were crossing the river. The stallion would not be bothered by his weight in the water and the youth hoped that he would accept it when they were on the other side.

There was the river up ahead! The excited yells of the Flathead warriors were ringing in Lame Bear's ears. Fawn never hesitated when she reached the bank, but plunged willingly into the icy water. The stallion stayed right with her. For a moment the cold water took their breath away, but the horses quickly recovered and began swimming strongly.

Lame Bear reluctantly dropped his bow, arrows and buffalo robe into the river, keeping only his knife. He did not want anything to get in his way when he tried to get on the stallion. The horses were half way across when the youth slipped gently from the mare's back and swam over to the stallion. Speaking quiet words of encouragement, he grabbed a handful of mane and slowly pulled himself onto War Chief's back. The stallion flicked his ears back for a moment, letting Lame Bear know that he knew that he was there.

Lame Bear stroked the wet back. "Now War Chief we will show these Flathead warriors what you can do."

The horses reached the opposite shore and lunged out of the water. By now rain was coming down in a steady drizzle. For a moment both horses stood, sides heaving, catching their breath. Lame Bear sat motionless, praying that War Chief was not going to buck with him.

The Flathead warriors were on the other shore. Lame Bear squeezed his legs against the stallion's sides, giving him the command to go forward. He felt the horse's muscles tighten and sensed the coming reaction. Lame Bear gritted his teeth and grabbed as much mane as he could hold, but nothing happened. Fawn and War Chief had their heads up, listening and testing the wind. Lame Bear heard it too, the familiar, haunting neigh of Fleet Foot. Fawn nickered a frantic greeting

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and War Chief neighed his challenge. The youth understood now; he must keep the mare in front of him.

He spoke to her, "Go home Fawn, take us home."

The mare trotted away from the river, then broke into a canter. War Chief was quick to follow.

The rain was falling harder now. The thick, gray clouds were dropping lower on the mountains and the dwindling light was making it difficult to see. It would be getting dark soon. At first, Lame Bear thought that his eyes were playing tricks on him. He thought he saw another horse running beside Fawn. It looked like a horse; yet it was more like a shadow. War Chief was having a hard time keeping up with Fawn. The stallion was stretched out, running hard but the mare was keeping an easy lead. Even though Fawn was exhausted she was out-running War Chief! For an instant Lame Bear saw clearly the two horses in front of him. The other horse was Fleet Foot! He was running beside Fawn, giving her his strength and his speed. It was a thrilling sight that lasted only for a moment. Then the two horses disappeared into the mist.

Lame Bear was so enchanted by the scene before him that he neither heard nor saw the Flathead arrow that barely missed him. The warriors were close enough to see that they were chasing a youth instead of a man. The shame of being outsmarted by a boy drove them to desperate measures. If they had to kill Lame Bear to get the horses they would do it. Only the heavy mist saved Lame Bear from a second arrow. They would not miss a third time, given a clear shot.

Chapter XII
HIGH PLACES

Red Eagle stood facing the east, watching the sun rise and praying to the spirits. When he was through, he turned to face the mountains. What a glorious morning! It was that beautiful time of year when the days were no longer hot, nor did they have the cold bite of Fall. The sky was crystal clear and fresh snow showed white on the mountains.

Fresh snow! Red Eagle's face showed his worry. It was early summer when Fine Bull came to him to explain the disappearance of his son. The old man said that Lame Bear went on a journey that took him across the mountains. He would say no more. It was only Red Eagle's love and respect for the old man that enabled him to trust Fine Bull's judgement concerning Lame Bear's safety. But now he could no longer conceal his worry. It was time to be moving the village south. The snows would be coming soon. He could not wait for his son much longer.

Fine Bull watched Red Eagle with a heavy heart. He knew what was on the brave warrior's mind, for it was troubling him too. With or without the Medicine Hat stallion, Lame Bear should have returned by now. The old man had greater worries than the chief because he knew just how dangerous a mission the youth had gone on across the mountains. Fine Bull prayed that for Red Eagle's sake the spirits would return Lame Bear soon.

The sun was half way across the sky when Red Eagle climbed up the hillside to get a better view of the trails coming into camp from the west. He sat down and soon was lost in thoughts of his son. How he missed him!

The warrior had been sitting alone for a long time. At first he did not pay any attention to the neighing horse. It was probably just some horse that was separated from the main herd. The neighing persisted, getting louder all of the time. Something about it began to bother Red Eagle. It sounded so much like Fleet Foot. No, that was impossible! He searched the tree line anxiously. There was a movement in the trees. He could not see whether it was a deer, an elk, or a horse. Red Eagle's eyes burned from the strain of watching. Then there it was, coming out of the trees, a buckskin horse. Now there were two horses and one was carrying a rider! The chief leaped to his feet and ran down the slope as fast as he could go.

Red Eagle became more excited the closer he got to the two horses. He recognized the buckskin mare as one from Fine Bull's band. The other horse he had never seen before, but he was sure its rider was Lame Bear. As Red Eagle approached the horses, he slowed down, not wanting to startle them. The rider on the Medicine Hat was in trouble and Red Eagle did not want to make matters worse by causing the horses to run away. He started talking to Fawn as he approached her. The mare was standing still, as if she were in a trance. Red Eagle went to her and began stroking her neck. He could see plainly now that the slumped over figure on the Medicine Hat stallion was Lame Bear.

War Chief was completely spent. Only his strong will to survive was keeping him going. He refused to let Fawn get out of his sight. The stallion's senses were dulled by exhaustion and hunger. It was not until he bumped into Fawn that he realized there was a human standing in front of him. War Chief snorted his alarm, gathering his remaining strength for an attack. He was not going to run anymore.

Red Eagle was saddened by the sight of the two horses. They were gaunt and weak and would need immediate attention if they were to be saved. But he was even more concerned with

War Chief's burden. His son was either unconscious or dead. The stallion, with ears back, made it very clear that he would not give up the youth without a fight so Red Eagle took Fawn's mane and led her slowly back to camp, War Chief following behind her.

When he was near camp, Red Eagle yelled to one of the men on guard to go get Fine Bull. He wanted everyone else to stay in camp so that the stallion would not be made more upset than he already was by a crowd of people.

Fine Bull came quickly. He saw in a moment Red Eagle's plight. He spoke softly to the two horses and then he moved slowly to Fawn's side. The mare nuzzled him, glad to feel his touch and hear his familiar voice. In one graceful move the old man mounted Fawn and moved her back beside War Chief. The mare's nearness reassured the stallion.

Fine Bull spoke softly, trying to get the horse to relax. "So we meet again, Medicine Hat. You have grown into a fine horse. Thank you for bringing our son home, but now you must let us have him."

Lame Bear had tied himself on to his horse before he lost consciousness. A piece of rawhide stretched from one wrist under the stallion's neck to the other wrist. Taking out his knife, Fine Bull leaned over slowly and cut the leather. Then he took the limp form of the youth and gently pulled him from War Chief's back and draped him across the withers of his own horse. Red Eagle took the stallion's lead rope and together the men returned to the village. They went straight to Fine Bull's tipi.

The chief was first to speak. "Fine Bull, you are very wise. Take my son and use your wisdom and powers to save him. I will care for the horses. May we both be successful!"

"I will do all that I can for your son." replied Fine Bull. "Lame Bear is special. The Earth Powers have a plan for his life. I do not think that it is his time to die."

Red Eagle went away from Fine Bull's lodge reassured. In the meantime, he must use his own wisdom in caring for the horses. With proper attention they would recover from their ordeal as sound as when they started.

Lame Bear floated in and out of consciousness for several days. He was so cold. Where was his buffalo robe? Snow, everywhere there was snow. He could not see. Where was Fawn? He must not lose Fawn! "Fawn wait for me! Don't leave me!"

Fine Bull worked continually over Lame Bear, sleeping only for brief periods of time. He kept the youth's body surrounded by hot rocks wrapped in furs. Lame Bear was near death. His body was incapable of producing its own heat. Hour after hour the old man forced spoonfuls of hot broth between the youth's trembling lips. Gradually the chills became less violent and Lame Bear sank into a deep, deep sleep.

Lame Bear lay for a long time, his eyes closed, testing his senses. He was alive! He was warm and he was hungry! Lame Bear opened his eyes slowly and turned his head toward the fire. Fine Bull was sitting there, smoking his pipe, thinking far-away thoughts.

"How long have I been here?" he asked.

The sound of Lame Bear's voice breaking the silence startled Fine Bull, causing him to drop his pipe. "Welcome back, my son," he said. "The sun has risen and set ten times since you have come to my tipi."

Lame Bear was full of questions. "How did I get here? The horses! Where are the horses?"

Fine Bull patiently answered all of the youth's questions, telling him that the horses were healthy and strong.

"War Chief. I must see War Chief." Lame Bear tried to rise, but fell back too weak to hold himself up.

"Who is War Chief?" asked the old man, with a twinkle in his eyes.

"War Chief is the Medicine Hat," replied Lame Bear. "Do you like him?"

"Yes, but that is enough talk for now. You must eat and rest. You can tell me what happened later," said Fine Bull.

Lame Bear spent the next few days resting and eating. Word of his recovery was sent to Red Eagle but the youth requested not to see his father until he was completely strong again. Red Eagle and Fine Bull understood. Lame Bear wanted his homecoming to be something special.

In the days that followed, Lame Bear told Fine Bull about his adventures in the Flathead valley. The old man's eyes shone with excitement, and often he nodded his approval.

"They almost captured me, Fine Bull. The horses were tired and the Flatheads were closing in on us. I was ready to give up, and then he came and saved us."

"Who came?" asked Fine Bull.

"The swift one. He came out of nowhere. He gave the horses strength and guided them through the storm. We would have been lost in the snow, but he kept us on the trail. I was so cold from the river and the sleet. My mind started playing tricks on me. That is when I tied myself on to the horse. The last thing I remember was hearing the angry yells of the Flatheads. They could not see me; it was snowing so hard. They would not follow me into the storm for fear of losing their horses on the treacherous trail." Lame Bear shivered just thinking about it.

When Lame Bear finished his story, both he and the old man sat silently staring into the fire, each lost in his own thoughts. Finally, Fine Bull spoke. "Lame Bear, you have come far. I remember when I saw you sitting by the river bank last spring. You were weak, both in your body and in your heart. Now your body is strong and your heart is full of courage. You are ready to take the way that will make you a great warrior."

The youth smiled as he remembered. "I had the heart of a

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rabbit then. But that person is a stranger to me now. I lost him somewhere on my journey to the high places."

"The high places?" asked Fine Bull.

"Yes, the high places. The Earth Powers have taken my spirit from the depths of the valley of despair to the high places where only the eagles and the mountain sheep dare tread. They have given me a vision of something far greater than myself. I am no longer afraid," he said.

"This is good," replied Fine Bull.

"I am ready to return to my father's lodge now," said Lame Bear.

Together the youth and the old man walked out to where the horses were grazing. Lame Bear whistled to War Chief. The Medicine Hat stallion raised his head and neighed a joyous greeting. Lame Bear left Fine Bull and walked to where his horse was standing. The two exchanged affectionate greetings. Then, grabbing a hank of mane, the youth swung gracefully up on War Chief's back. Sitting straight and proud, Lame Bear rode the stallion through the village to his father's lodge. Red Eagle heard the approaching horse. He lifted the flap and stepped outside. The youth dismounted and went to Red Eagle. The hearts of the father and the son were full.

Lame Bear and his father clasped wrists and looked into each other's eyes. Red Eagle spoke slowly. "My son you have brought honor to my lodge. Not only did you win the heart of the Medicine Hat stallion but you dishonored the mighty warriors of the Flathead nation by stealing him away from them. Lame Bear is no longer a fitting name for you. I think some day you will become a great warrior with many horses in your herd. Tonight there will be a celebration to honor my son, Many Horses."

TO THE READER

This is one of a series of stories of the Blackfeet Indians which take place when the Blackfeet were at the height of their power, hunting buffalo north to the North Saskatchewan River, south to the Yellowstone River, east to the Montana-North Dakota border, and west to the Rocky Mountains, and raiding far beyond. The Blackfeet people still live in the heart of this territory, in Southern Alberta and North Central Montana.

Little Blaze and the Buffalo Jump is about Blackfeet life before the coming of the horse.

Natosi: Strong Medicine is a story of the capture of the first horses by the Blackfeet.

Quest for Courage is a novel of Blackfeet life in the early 1800's when life centered around horses and buffalo, and the Blackfeet had become one of the most powerful tribes on the northern plains. Lame Bear, a boy who has been crippled by a broken leg, overcomes his handicap in the pursuit of a wild stallion which has eluded the greatest of warriors.

Sik-ki-mi is the story of a Blackfeet who faces the first steamboat on the Yellowstone while on a raid to bring back a buffalo horse from a Crow camp.

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Quest For Courage

A broken leg caused by a riding accident leaves Lame Bear crippled. He can no longer compete with the other boys. With no future as a warrior and a hunter, Lame Bear is a disgrace to his father's lodge and to his tribe. Drowning himself in sorrow and self-pity he becomes more and more useless until one day an old man speaks words of wisdom to him that will change his life.

Far away in the Flathead valley lives a Medicine Hat stallion pursued by many great warriors. How can a crippled boy succeed where these warriors have failed? Will Lame Bear and the stallion survive the ordeal that will test their strength and their courage?